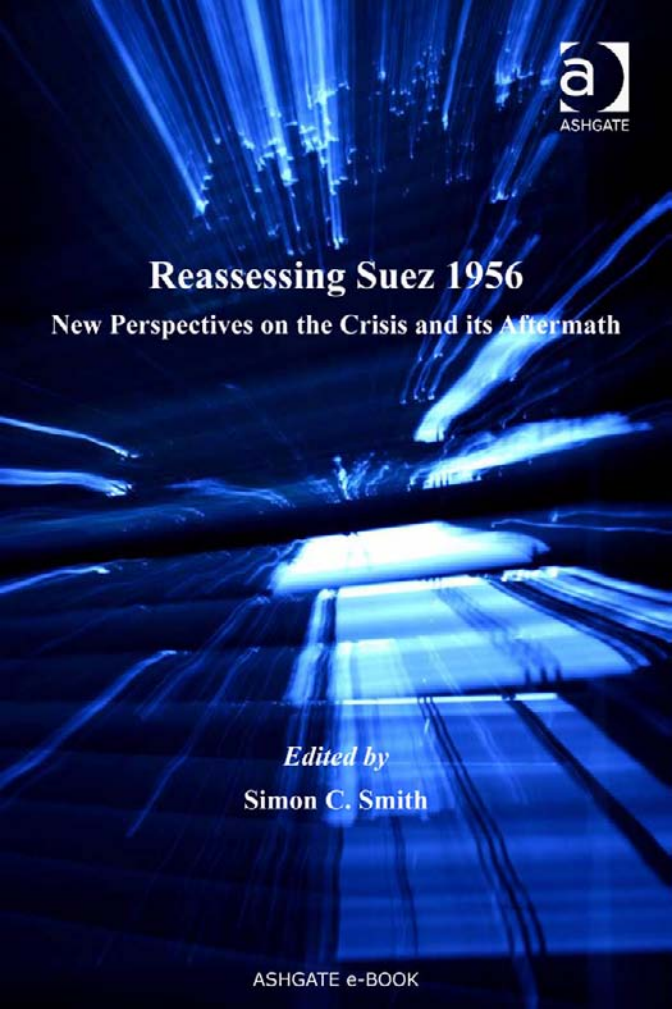
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New Perspectives on the Crisis and its Aftermath
Edited by
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REASSESSING SUEZ 1956

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Reassessing Suez 1956

New Perspectives on the Crisis and its Aftermath

Edited by

SIMON C. SMITH
University of Hull, UK

ASHGATE

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Simon C. Smith

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Map of Suez Canal on p. xv based on a map by Michael T. Thornhill. Used with permission.

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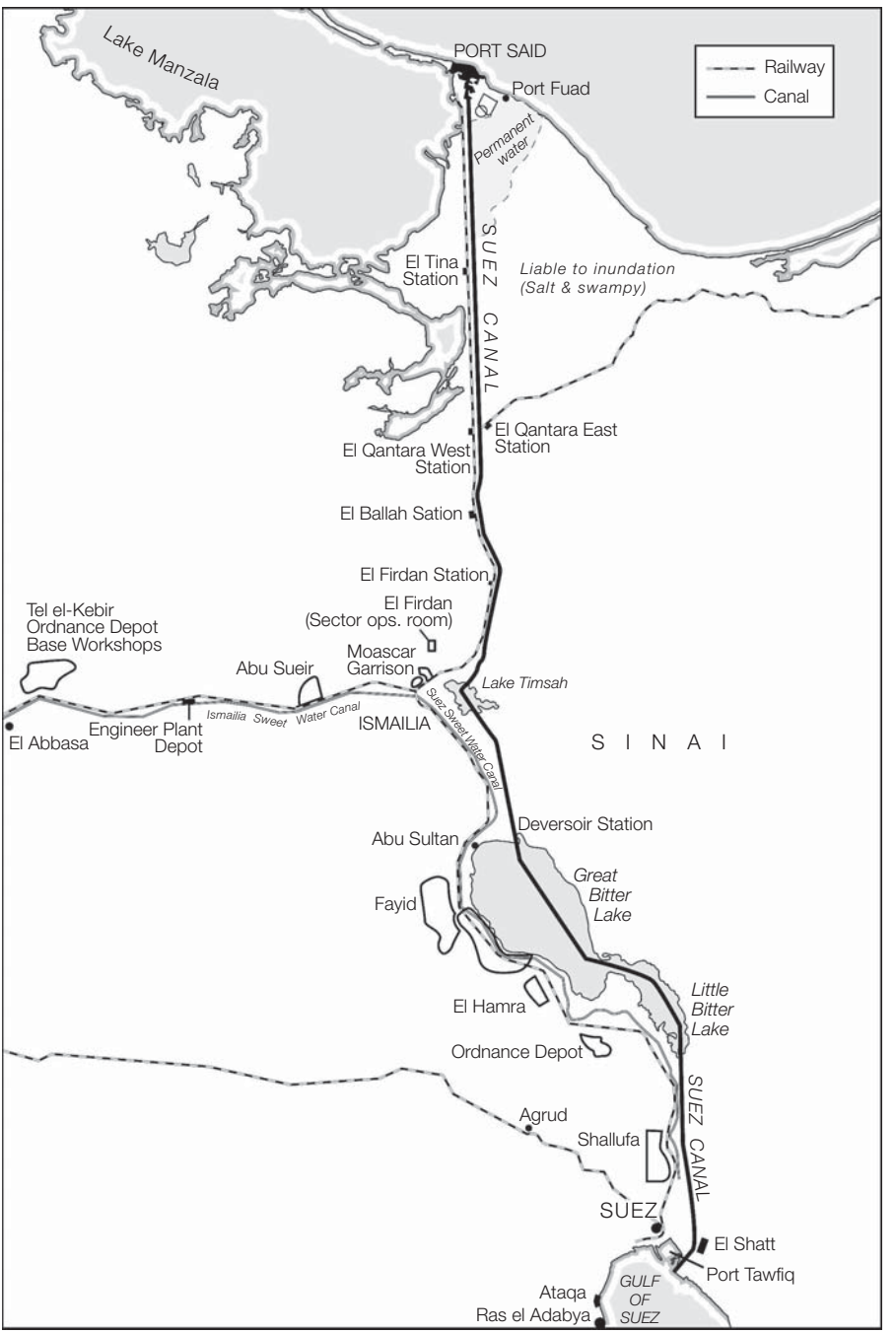
List of Abbreviations

ADL	Armistice Demarcation Lines
ADM	Admiralty
AIR	Records of the Air Ministry
AMEJ	Julian Amery Papers
AP	Lord Avon Papers, University of Birmingham
AWF	Ann Whitman File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers as President
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
BBC-SWB	BBC Summary of World Broadcasts
BGA	Ben-Gurion Archives, Sde Boker, Israel
BGD	Ben-Gurion Diary
BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science
BMEO	British Middle East Office
BOAR	British Army on the Rhine
CAB	Cabinet
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CO	Colonial Office
COS	Chiefs of Staff
CRD	Conservative Research Department
DC	Defence Committee
DDEL	Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, KS
DEFE	Records of the Ministry of Defence
DOD	Department of Defense (US)
DRA	Directorate of the Republican Archives (Turkey)
EC	Egypt Committee (British Cabinet)
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO	Foreign Office
FRUS	*Foreign Relations of the United States*
IAF	Israeli Air Force
IDF	Israeli Defence Force
ISA	Israel State Archives, Jerusalem
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff (US)
JP	Joint Planners (US)
LBJL	Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX
LPA	Israeli Labour Party Archives
LSE	London School of Economics
MCF	Movement for Colonial Freedom
MEC	Middle East Command
MEDO	Middle East Defence Organisation
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD
NEACC	Near East Arms Coordinating Committee

NSC	National Security Council (US)
OCB	Operations Coordinating Board (US National Security Council)
OSANSA	Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Records (US)
PREM	Records of the Prime Minister's Office
SCUA	Suez Canal Users' Association
SDECE	Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre Espionnage
SELO	Selwyn Lloyd Papers
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate (US)
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SUEZOHP	Suez Oral History Project
T	Treasury
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, London
TOS	Trucial Oman Scouts
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAR	United Arab Republic
VCNS	Vice Chief of Naval Staff
WHO, OSS	White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary
WO	War Office

The Suez Canal



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Introduction

Simon C. Smith

'We shall eliminate the past by regaining our right to the Suez Canal.'[1] With this dramatic announcement on 26 July 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company. Referring to the controversy which accompanied his handling of the subsequent crisis, Anthony Eden, in the first volume of his memoirs published just four years after the event, remarked that 'failure to act would have brought the worst of consequences, just as I think the world would have suffered less if Hitler had been resisted on the Rhine, in Austria or in Czechoslovakia, rather than in Poland. This will be for history to determine.'[2] Eden's attempts at justifying a decision-making process which led to one of the gravest international crises of the post-war era has by no means passed unchallenged. Indeed, history's verdict on Suez has been as contested and controversial as the crisis itself. Although the crisis has been one of the most heavily researched and debated episodes in the study of modern international history, Suez has continued to yield its secrets through the release of new documents, not least by the National Archives at Kew.[3] With the milestone of the fiftieth anniversary of the crisis having been reached in 2006, it is particularly appropriate to reassess Suez in all its multifaceted complexity. The 15 chapters in this volume have been selected to provide fresh perspectives on the crisis, its origins and aftermath. Although Britain, as in many ways the principal actor, is strongly represented, there are also chapters on both the regional and international dimensions to the crisis, and crucially, the interaction between the two.

Suez: International and Regional Dimensions

Keith Kyle in his classic study of Suez explicitly recognized the interconnections between the regional and the international contexts. He describes Israel's reprisal raid into the Egyptian-controlled Palestinian territory of Gaza on 28 February/1 March 1955 as 'an event which started the real countdown to the Suez War'.[4] On the one hand, it refocused attention on the emotive issue of the Palestinian Arabs who had fled their homes during the first Arab–Israeli war of 1948–49. On the other, it fundamentally altered the priorities of Egypt's military ruler, Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser. As Kyle observes: 'he was still wedded to the economic development of Egypt but the overriding need was to ensure Egyptian rearmament from whatever

1 Laura M. James, *Nasser at War: Arab Images of the Enemy* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 21.
2 Sir Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (London, 1960), p. 559.
3 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/releases/2006/december/suez.htm>.
4 Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London, 1991), p. 62.

sources it could be obtained'.[5] Announced on 27 September 1955, Nasser's famous deal to acquire large quantities of Soviet arms through Czechoslovakia dramatically altered Israeli perceptions of the Egyptian leader. As David Tal has observed: 'It was the arms deal that was the turning point for [David] Ben-Gurion:[6] the balance was weighted so heavily in Egypt's favour, he believed, that Nasser now possessed the tool with which to put his intentions into practice.'[7] In consequence, Ben-Gurion was no longer wedded to the idea of maintaining the status quo with his neighbours, looking instead to the modernization of the Israeli Defence Force and even pre-emptive action to maintain Israel's precarious security. Ben-Gurion found a willing partner in France, which traced the sources of its troubles in Algeria to Cairo. Dilating on Jerusalem's role in cementing the 'alliance' with France, Motti Golani has noted: 'Israel managed to persuade the French that it could be quite useful to them – both in intelligence and actual military operations – in their struggle against Nasser.'[8] At the secret Vermars conference on 22–24 June 1956, the Israeli delegates found their French hosts in obliging mood, leaving with everything they wanted, including a commitment to supply 200 AMX tanks and 72 Mystère-4 fighters. The nationalization of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July merely served to strengthen relations between the two countries, to the extent that a further agreement was reached on 21 September 1956 on nuclear co-operation.

Two days after Nasser's demarche, the French Ambassador in London, Jean Chauvel, expostulated: 'If Egypt's act went without response it would be impossible for France to pursue the struggle in Algeria.'[9] In equally colourful terms, the French Foreign Minister told US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles: 'According to the most reliable intelligence sources we have only a few weeks in which to save North Africa. Of course, the loss North Africa would then be followed by that of Black Africa, and the entire territory would rapidly escape European control and influence.'[10] The British government, under the splenetic stewardship of Sir Anthony Eden, was equally fixated on Egypt and the actions of its charismatic leader.

'During the past few weeks,' Clarissa Eden famously remarked in November 1956, 'I have sometimes felt that the Suez Canal was flowing through my drawing room.'[11] Although an unguarded aside, she accurately reflected the all-consuming proportions which the waterway and its nationalization assumed for her husband. The British premier's apocalyptic visions of the consequences of letting Nasser 'get

5 Ibid., p. 65

6 Minister of Defence, and from November 1955, Prime Minister of Israel.

7 David Tal, 'Introduction', in David Tal (ed.), *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East* (London, 2001), p. 7.

8 Motti Golani, *Israel in Search of a War: The Sinai Campaign 1955–1956* (Brighton, 1998), p. 26.

9 Maurice Vaïsse, 'France and the Suez Crisis', in Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds), *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford, 1989), p. 137.

10 Ibid.

11 D.R. Thorpe, *Eden: The Life and Times of Anthony Eden, First Earl of Avon, 1897–1977* (London, 2004), p. 500.

away with it'[12] unbalanced his judgement and hardened his predisposition neither to seek nor listen to contradictory counsel. Indeed, his tendency to rely on the advice of those in Whitehall and at Westminster who were in fundamental sympathy with his attitudes merely reinforced the mindset which, following the nationalization, was to lead inexorably to Eden's nemesis by the end of the year. Six months before the nationalization of the Canal Company, Eden was comparing Nasser with Mussolini, adding that the Egyptian leader's aim was to become a 'Caesar from the Gulf to the Atlantic, and to kick us out of it all'.[13] Soon after the nationalization of the Canal, Eden told the Cabinet: 'No arrangement for the future use of this great international waterway can be acceptable to the British Government which would leave it in the hands of a single power which could exploit it purely for purposes of national policy.'[14] Eden went so far as to state: 'The Egyptian has his thumb on our windpipe.'[15] In similarly lurid terms, he argued that Nasser's action amounted to having 'his thumb … in our jugular vein'.[16] In correspondence with Dwight D. Eisenhower, moreover, Eden told the US President that 'It would be an ignoble end to our long history if we tamely accepted to perish by degrees.'[17]

Eden's tendency to view the nationalization crisis in apocalyptic terms was shared by a number of other key decision-makers. For instance, the Commonwealth Secretary, Lord Home, asserted: 'If we do not [stand firm], the oil supplies of the free world will be at his [Nasser's] mercy and Commonwealth communications and trade will be gravely jeopardised.'[18] In a similar vein, the Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, asserted that 'if Nasser wins or even appears to win we might as well as a government (and indeed as a country) go out of business'.[19] Another Cabinet 'hawk', Chancellor of the Exchequer Harold Macmillan, confided:

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12 This phrase was used in a letter to President Eisenhower in the early stages of the crisis, and became a constant refrain for Eden (Message from Eden to Eisenhower, 5 August 1956, cited in Peter G. Boyle, (ed.), *The Eden–Eisenhower Correspondence, 1955–1957*, (Chapel Hill, NC and London), 2005, p. 159). By early October, Britain's Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, Bernard Burrows, wearied of the phrase, requesting: 'Is it possible for less prominence to be given to the line: "If Nasser gets away with it we are finished in the Middle East"? I do not myself believe that the proposition is true, but the best way to make it come true is to go on saying it publicly' (TNA, FO 1016/488, Letter from Burrows to H. Beeley, no. 1427/183/56, 1 October 1956).

13 Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: Diaries, 1951–56* (London, 1986), p. 327.

14 Muhammad Abd el-Wahab Sayed-Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy, 1952–6* (London, 1989), p. 123.

15 Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945–56: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC and London, 1991), p. 213.

16 David Dutton, *Anthony Eden: A Life and Reputation* (London, 1997), p. 384.

17 Message from Eden to Eisenhower, 6 September 1956, cited in Boyle, *The Eden–Eisenhower Correspondence*, p. 167.

18 Jonathan Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis: Reluctant Gamble* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 28.

19 David Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* (Oxford, 1988), p. 45.

> if Nasser 'gets away with it', we are done for. The whole Arab world will despise us. Nuri[20] and our friends will fall. It may well be the end of British influence and strength for ever. So, in the last resort, we must use force and defy opinion, here and overseas.[21]

Macmillan subsequently wrote: 'It is absolutely essential to humiliate Nasser – or there will be no oil to put through the Canal. We must do it quickly, or our M[iddle] East friends (like Nuri) will fall.'[22] Macmillan's observations reveal that Britain's response to the nationalization crisis, in keeping with that of France, had a strong regional dimension. Indeed, the nationalization crisis can perhaps most usefully be seen as a part of the wider crisis in Anglo-Egyptian relations which pre-dated Nasser's announcement on 26 July.

Anglo-Egyptian antipathies which had characterized relations between the two countries since 1945, if not before, had focused on Britain's military occupation of the vast military complex in the Suez Canal Zone. The agreement reached in 1954 under which British forces would evacuate within two years appeared to have drawn the poison from the relationship. Eden's resolve to shore up Britain's regional position through strengthening its ties with Egypt's principal rival for Arab hegemony, the Hashemite kingdom of Iraq, and Nasser's equal determination to frustrate this aim, ensured that any improvement in Anglo-Egyptian relations was transient. Britain's decision in April 1955 to join Iraq and Turkey in a regional defence organization, the Baghdad Pact, represented a significant reverse for Nasser, who set about deterring 'floating' Arab states from adhering.[23] This reached a remarkable peak at the end of the year, when Nasser, with the assistance of Saudi Arabia, not only launched a fierce propaganda campaign against Jordanian accession, but also financed and orchestrated local subversive activities against the Pact. As violence mounted, the Jordanian government announced in January 1956 that it would not be joining. For Eden, worse was to follow two months later, when King Hussein of Jordan dismissed the long-standing British Commander of the Arab Legion, Sir John Glubb. Although the initiative for this act undoubtedly came from the king himself, Eden placed the blame squarely on Nasser's shoulders. In an infamous telephone conversation with Minister of State at the Foreign Office Anthony Nutting, Eden exploded: 'But what's all this nonsense about isolating Nasser or "neutralising" him, as you call it? I want him destroyed, can't you understand?'[24]

Scott Lucas, however, has sought to explode the 'myth' fostered by Nutting's reminiscences that Eden was bent on the destruction of Nasser and that this

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20 Nuri al-Said, Prime Minister of Iraq.

21 Peter Catterall (ed.), *The Macmillan Diaries: The Cabinet Years, 1950–1957* (London, 2003), p. 587.

22 Ibid., pp. 599–600.

23 Elie Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World: The Struggle over the Baghdad Pact* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 124–5; Said K. Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* (New York, 2004), p. 80.

24 Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson* (London, 1967), p. 34. Nutting later claimed that Eden had in fact said he wanted Nasser 'murdered' (see Chapter 13 in this volume).

imperative led unavoidably to collusion with France and Israel to bring it about.[25] In his analysis, regional factors, not least the Israeli raid on the Jordanian border settlement of Qalqilya on 10 October 1956, provide the key to explaining the decision to sanction a military solution to the crisis. Not only was Britain obliged to come to Jordan's aid under the terms of the Anglo-Jordanian military alliance, but also the Eden government increasingly came to base its position in the Middle East on a close relationship with Amman. British plans to come to Jordan's defence under the terms of the 1946 Anglo-Jordanian treaty, however, conflicted with Operation Musketeer, devised in the event of military action being taken against Egypt. As the Chiefs of Staff concluded: 'we should bring home very forcibly to Ministers that we could either go to the aid of Jordan against Israel with sea and air power, or we could launch MUSKETEER [REVISE] [*sic*]; we could not do both.'[26] Drawing conclusions from Qalqilya, Lucas observes:

> intentionally or accidentally, the Israeli raid into Jordan, rather than Eden's 'irrationality' or an act by the Egyptians, was the catalyst for the tripartite attack on Egypt. It gave the French the opportunity to renew their pressure upon the British and Eden, forced to suspend military operations for several months, the excuse to embark upon a new effort for the overthrow of Nasser.[27]

Interestingly, Lucas points out that at the notorious meeting between the French envoys, Maurice Challe and Albert Gazier, and Eden on 14 October, at which the prospect of co-operation with Israel against Egypt was first mooted, the conversation actually began with a discussion of Jordan and an appeal by the French for Britain to ease Israeli–Jordanian tension by asking Iraq to suspend movement of its troops into the kingdom. If the regional context played a key role in Anglo-French calculations, it also impacted upon Anglo-American relations and had a central role in producing the schism between the two countries by the end of 1956.

Referring to the 'special relationship' in the Middle East, Scott Lucas has noted that: 'Co-operation from 1954 to 1956 was based upon a tenuous convergence of aims.'[28] In a similar vein, Nigel Ashton has identified a 'patchwork … of cooperation and conflict on the basis of perceptions of threat and of interest between Britain and America'.[29] Ashton adds that the reason why the Middle East proved to be 'such a fertile ground for conflict between the two powers was simply that their interests here often failed to coincide'.[30] Indeed, Britain's tendency to view the Middle East in terms of the preservation of its imperial interests clashed with US Cold War objectives of containing the Soviet Union. The potency of this fundamental difference in outlook

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25 W. Scott Lucas, 'Redefining the Suez "Collusion"', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26/1 (1990): 107.

26 W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1991), p. 233.

27 Ibid., p. 236.

28 Ibid., p. 3.

29 Nigel John Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955–59* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 113.

30 Ibid., p. 1.

to produce conflict had already been exposed following Iranian premier Mohammad Mossadeq's nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951. Moreover, the American tendency to perceive the nationalization dispute in Cold War, containment terms, clashed with Britain's determination to protect its economic assets in Iran. As the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Sir William Strang, presciently noted: 'to the Americans, in the fight against Communism in Persia, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company is expendable. It is not possible for us to start from this premise.'[31] Anglo-American divisions resurfaced with Britain's adherence to the Baghdad Pact in 1955. Discussing the Pact with President Eisenhower, Secretary of State Dulles asserted: 'the trouble was that the British have taken it over and run it as an instrument of British policy – that has drawn down upon it a tremendous amount of criticism'.[32] Dulles also told congressional leaders: 'The US has not consented to join the Pact, in spite of British pressure, for a variety of reasons, but primarily because the Pact is not now primarily an instrument for collective defense against the Soviet Union but has become an instrument of Arab intrigue.'[33] The US administration was also strongly critical of Eden's attempt to incorporate Jordan into the Baghdad Pact, the failure to do so prompting Eisenhower to write: 'We tried to make the British see the danger of … pressuring Jordan to join the Northern Tier Pact. They went blindly ahead and only recently have been suffering one of the most severe diplomatic defeats Britain has taken in many years.'[34] Anglo-American tension stemming from a failure of interests to coincide was also evident over the disputed territory of Buraimi in south-eastern Arabia.

Mulling over the state of Anglo-American relations on the eve of his resignation as Prime Minister in January 1957, Anthony Eden remarked: 'It may be that the United States attitude to us in the Middle East dates from our refusal to give up Buraimi.'[35] Buraimi was claimed, on the one hand, by the British protected states of Oman and Abu Dhabi, and on the other by the American protégé Saudi Arabia. Following failed attempts at arbitration, the British in October 1955 expelled the Saudi forces which had been in occupation of the oasis without first consulting with, let alone informing, the Americans. As Tore Petersen has highlighted, this act of brazen unilateralism on the part of Britain caused 'considerable consternation' in Washington, Assistant Secretary of State Hoover berating the British Ambassador, Sir Roger Makins, for the lack of consultation and insisting that Britain and America

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31 Steve Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil: Crisis in Iran* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 66.

32 Memorandum of a conversation between the President and the Secretary of State, 7 April 1956, cited in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955–57, Volume 12: Near East Region; Iran; Iraq* (Washington, DC, 1991), p. 270

33 Memorandum of a conversation, Department of State, 10 April 1956, cited in *FRUS, 1955–57, Volume XV: Arab–Israeli Dispute, January 1–July 26, 1956* (Washington, DC, 1989), p. 506

34 Kyle, *Suez*, p. 91.

35 TNA, CAB 129/84, CP(57)8, 'The economic situation', note by the Eden, 5 January 1957.

'play it together from now on'.[36] When the Australian ambassador to the United Nations tackled Hoover on the Anglo-American fissure over Suez, he responded by pointing out: 'this cleavage had gone a great deal deeper than people imagined. It had started a long time ago even before Suez and as far back as the Buraimi incident.'[37] With considerable justification, therefore, Petersen has argued that the Buraimi crisis 'presented Anglo-American diplomats with a conflict of interest which … eventually contributed to the rupture of the Atlantic Alliance during the Suez crisis of 1956'.[38]

Referring to the ultimatum issued on 30 October for Egypt and Israel to withdraw ten miles either side of the Canal to allow for an Anglo-French occupation, an official of the Foreign Office jested: 'It's rather fun to be at Number 10 the night we smashed the Anglo-American alliance.'[39] Indeed, Eisenhower had repeatedly and consistently warned against a military solution to the nationalization crisis. In perhaps his clearest message, the President had told Eden:

> The use of force would, it seems to me, vastly increase the area of jeopardy. I do not see how the economy of Western Europe can long survive the burden of prolonged military operations, as well as the denial of Near East oil. Also, the peoples of the Near East and of North Africa and, to some extent, of all of Asia and all of Africa, would be consolidated against the West to such a degree which, I fear, could not be overcome in a generation and, perhaps, not even in a century particularly having in mind the capacity of the Russians to make mischief.[40]

Once the Suez War had begun, Eisenhower maintained: 'At all costs the Soviets must be prevented from seizing a mantle of world leadership through a false but convincing exhibition of concern for smaller nations.'[41] Referring to the Soviet Union's contemporaneous suppression of the Hungarian revolt, Allen Dulles (brother of John Foster and Director of the Central Intelligence Agency) questioned: 'How can anything be done about the Russians even if they suppress the revolt, when our own allies are guilty of exactly similar acts of aggression?'[42] Summing up the dilemma which had faced successive administrations, Foster Dulles told the National Security Council:

> For many years now the United States has been walking a tightrope between the effort to maintain our old and valued relations with our British and French allies on the one hand, and on the other trying to assure ourselves of the friendship and understanding of the newly independent countries who have escaped from colonialism … Unless we

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36 Tore T. Petersen, *The Middle East between the Great Powers: Anglo-American Conflict and Cooperation, 1952–7* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 53.

37 Ibid., p. 72.

38 Tore T. Petersen, 'Anglo-American Rivalry in the Middle East: The Struggle for the Buraimi Oasis, 1953–1957', *International History Review*, 14/1 (1992): 72.

39 Lucas, *Divided We Stand*, p. 263.

40 Letter from Eisenhower to Eden, 2 September 1956, cited in Boyle, *The Eden–Eisenhower Correspondence*, p. 163.

41 Memorandum by the President, 1 November 1956, *FRUS, 1955–57, Volume XVI: Suez Crisis* (Washington, DC, 1990), p. 924.

42 Lucas, *Divided We Stand*, p. 276.

> now assert and maintain this leadership, all of these newly independent countries will turn from us to the USSR. We will be looked upon as forever tied to British and French colonialist policies.[43]

Apart from Cold War considerations, the US administration was shocked at this latest example of British unilateralism. As Hoover remarked to the new British Ambassador in Washington, Harold Caccia, 'There had been Buraimi; then Jordan, and now Suez.'[44] Mindful of the fact that the British had kept them in the dark about their intentions in the run-up to the Suez War, the President famously declared: 'Nothing justifies double-crossing us.'[45] The fact that French Foreign Minister Pineau had divulged the details of collusion to the US Ambassador in Paris, Douglas Dillon, merely increased the American sense of betrayal.[46] Ironically, Eden himself was not immune to the feeling of being deceived. This reached a crescendo following a statement made by Dulles at a press conference on 2 October 1956. Referring to the Suez Canal Users' Association which Dulles himself had initiated, he remarked: 'There is talk about "teeth" being pulled out of it [SCUA] but there were never "teeth" in it.' In the estimation of Jonathan Pearson, this was a 'staggering blow to Eden, who had put all his hopes on SCUA and the possibility of international control of the Canal'.[47] Unburdening himself to his Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, Eden concluded: 'We have been misled so often by Dulles' ideas that we cannot afford to risk another misunderstanding … Time is not on out side in this matter.'[48] The years did not sooth the rancour and in retirement Eden described Dulles as 'tortuous as a snake, with much less excuse'.[49] Seeking to rationalize the Secretary of State's behaviour, Wm. Roger Louis has convincingly argued that 'he did not deliberately mislead but hoped, rather like Nasser, that the crisis would peter out in never-ending debate'.[50]

It was Eden's misreading of American policy, and particularly the likely reaction in Washington to the use of force, that represented his greatest failing over Suez. As Peter Hennessey explains:

> Instead of the Cold War factor overriding US doubts about the attack on Nasser as the Soviets' chosen instrument of penetration through the Middle East and into Africa, the fear of hot war had led Eisenhower to insist that nothing be done by the British, the French and the Israelis that might increase the chances of it.[51]

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43 Wm. Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization* (London, 2006), p. 659.

44 Petersen, *The Middle East and the Great Powers*, p. 72.

45 Peter Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain and Egypt, 1945–1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC and London), p. 230.

46 David Carlton, *Anthony Eden: A Biography* (London, 1981), p. 450.

47 Jonathan Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis: Reluctant Gamble* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 115–16.

48 Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism*, p. 657.

49 Ibid., p. 664.

50 Ibid., p. 14.

51 Peter Hennessy, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London, 2006), p. 442.

Recalling Harold Macmillan's disastrous misjudgement that Eisenhower would 'lie doggo' over the use of force, David Dutton, who has perhaps produced the most balanced biography of Eden, points out that 'there is a good case for a more equitable distribution of the burden of responsibility'.[52] If so, the Chancellor would be a prime candidate for sharing such a burden. Not only did he misread, and indeed misrepresent, the likely American response to force, but he also ignored Treasury advice about the possible financial consequences of a resort to arms.[53] Ironically, Macmillan, who succeeded in distancing himself from the decisions which had led to the Suez debacle, was the principal political beneficiary of Eden's demise, replacing him as Prime Minister in January 1957. It was Macmillan, however, who had to deal with the regional consequences of Suez, one of the most significant of which being the destabilizing of the pro-British monarchical regime in Iraq upon which British interests in the Middle East had increasingly been seen to rest.

Shortly after Macmillan assumed the premiership, the British Ambassador in Baghdad, Sir Michael Wright, reported:

> The action of Her Majesty's Government [at Suez], because it was linked with action by Israel, placed him [Nuri] personally, as well as the King and Crown Prince and all those in Iraq who had so actively pursued a policy of friendship with Her Majesty's Government, not only in the gravest political difficulty but in danger of their lives, and imperilled the continued existence of the régime and the monarchy.[54]

Wright highlighted in particular the precarious position of the Iraqi premier, who found the ground 'heaving under his feet'.[55] The Ambassador's observations proved prophetic, the Iraqi monarchy, along with Nuri, being swept aside a little over eighteen months after the Suez War. Although Britain clung resolutely onto its footholds in the Gulf and in southern Arabia,[56] the loss of Iraq as the epicentre of British influence was keenly felt. Macmillan himself confided that the Iraqi revolution of 14 July 1958 had had the effect of 'destroying at a blow a whole system of security which successive British Governments had built up'.[57] The consequences of Suez for French influence in the region were equally baleful, Maurice Vaïsse going so far as to assert that in the aftermath of Suez, 'French influence in the Arab world was in ruins'.[58] Although the domestic political repercussions in Paris were in the short term limited, Guy Mollet continuing as Prime Minister, the longer-term ones fostered the army's disenchantment with its political masters, which in turn contributed to the putsch in

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52 David Dutton, *Anthony Eden: A Life and Reputation* (London, 1997), p. 456.

53 Ibid., pp. 408, 411.

54 Wm. Roger Louis, 'The British and the Origins of the Iraqi Revolution', in Robert A. Fernea and Wm. Roger Louis (eds), *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited* (London, 1991), p. 43.

55 Ibid., p. 44.

56 See Simon C. Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States, 1950–71* (London, 2004); Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955–67: Last Outpost of a Middle East Empire* (London, 2005).

57 Harold Macmillan, *Riding the Storm, 1956–59* (London, 1971), p. 511.

58 Maurice Vaïsse, 'Post-Suez France', in Louis and Owen (eds), *Suez 1956*, p. 335.

Algeria on 13 May 1958 and ultimately the demise of the Fourth Republic.[59] As for the main regional players, Israel and Egypt, David Tal in Chapter 9 of this volume demonstrates the way in which Suez heightened Arab–Israeli hostility and acted as an important landmark on the road to the 1967 conflict.

Reassessing Suez

Arranged broadly chronologically, the individual chapters explore the origins of the crisis, the crisis itself, and its aftermath. In the opening chapter, Steve Morewood considers the special attachment which British decision-makers developed towards Suez, how its strategic and economic importance unfolded over the period, how the Canal regime was manipulated to suit British imperial interests and the defence of Suez, as well as its role in crises leading up to 1956. Michael Thornhill in Chapter 2 demonstrates that Sir Anthony Eden's actions during 1956 can only be understood properly with reference to the immense pressures Winston Churchill exerted on him during the earlier 'Battle of the Canal Zone' between 1951 and 1954. He concludes that Eden's record as prime minister was profoundly and disastrously influenced by Churchill's long shadow.

Concentrating on an earlier crisis, Peter Beck in Chapter 3 demonstrates that the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951 informed and shaped the approach of British statesmen, especially ones of Conservative hue, in their attitudes towards, and handling of, the subsequent Suez crisis in ways which have received insufficient attention in the historiography of Suez. Focusing on the activities of key Conservative backbench MPs, especially Julian Amery, Sue Onslow offers insights into the machinations and behaviour of unofficial 'operatives' in the state/private development of intelligence and covert action during the Suez crisis. Examining British plans to mount an Anglo-French invasion of Egypt and at the same time protect its client, Jordan, from Israeli attack, Eric Grove in Chapter 5 suggests that this dual strategy complicated the preparations for the eventual Suez campaign, including the coalition arrangements with the French, who had aligned themselves with Israel. Few studies of the Suez–Sinai war of 1956 have made use of archival material in order to examine Israel's perception of France both before and after those campaigns. In Chapter 6, Zach Levey explores the crucial Franco-Israeli relationship, arguing that, French arms sales notwithstanding, archival sources reveal that Israeli policy-makers and diplomats viewed France with considerable suspicion, and regarded the relationship as a temporary confluence of interests.

Clea Bunch in Chapter 7 examines US–Jordanian relations in the context of Suez, underlining that Nasser inspired a transformation in White House attitudes towards the kingdom of Jordan: as fears of Nasser's Soviet ties grew, King Hussein's image in Washington changed from that of a British puppet to a defiant Cold War warrior. In subsequent years, Hussein capitalized on his rivalry with Nasser to extract ever greater support from the United States. Concentrating on another aspect of the

59 Paul Gaujac, 'France and the Crisis of Suez: An Appraisal Forty Years On', in Tal (ed.), *The 1956 War*, p. 59.

interaction between the regional and international aspects of the crisis, Ayşegül Sever shows in Chapter 8 that Turkey's initially favourable attitude to forceful action over Suez stemmed from the importance which it placed on the partnership with the West in a bipolarized world order. While Turkey eventually joined the US in demanding British and French withdrawal from the Canal Zone, this was not out of sympathy for Nasser or his policies, but rather a reluctant move to pacify its most important ally, the US. Rescuing the Sinai War of 1956 from its status as a 'neglected war', in Chapter 9 David Tal underlines that it was, in fact, a watershed in the history of the Arab–Israeli conflict. On the one hand, Israel's completely unexpected attack on Egypt fortified its image as an aggressor and a tool in the hands of the imperialist powers, while on the other, Arab leaders' hostility towards Israel grew in a manner that had not been evident before 1956, thus paving the way for the resumption of fighting against Israel. From the Egyptian perspective, and using previously untapped sources, Laura James demonstrates that, as the crisis developed, Nasser ruled out the possibility of war, retaining his initial belief that his enemies would be restrained by external factors. Thus Egypt neglected indications that Israel might attack, and ignored Anglo-French preparations until British bombs actually started falling on Cairo, provoking a shocked internal crisis, and even discussion of surrender.

The final chapters deal essentially with the aftermath of the crisis. Centring on the strategic reassessment conducted by the Eisenhower administration following the crisis, Richard Damms in Chapter 12 revises existing interpretations by demonstrating that the Eisenhower Doctrine, enunciated in early 1957, proved to be stopgap measure. Adverse regional reactions convinced Eisenhower to seek alternative means of securing Western interests that would form the basis for American strategy in the region into the 1970s: limited accommodation with Nasser's Egypt, rapprochement with Israel, and the cultivation of Saudi Arabia and Iran as junior partners in the region. Examining the crisis from the perspective of the United Nations, Edward Johnson argues that the Foreign Office was caught between the conflicting pressures of on the one hand wishing Britain to be seen as a good UN member, while on the other having to defend the actions of Eden's government in the UN. He goes on to emphasize that in the aftermath of the crisis, the Foreign Office attempted to force a reappraisal of the role of the UN in both British foreign policy and the West's approach to the UN, but was constrained by American policy. Philip Murphy in Chapter 13 investigates the repercussions of Suez on British politics and the political process. He demonstrates that the culture of secrecy which pervaded British policymaking at the time of Suez found echoes in the subsequent attempts to conceal its less seemly sides. Focusing on attempts to suppress the revelations of Suez insider Anthony Nutting, he concludes that, so far as the permanent civil service was concerned, 'Suez resembled closely a private rather than an "official" secret'. Anglo-American relations in the Middle East at the time of Suez have attracted a great deal of historical attention. In Chapter 14, Tore Petersen sheds light on the 'special relationship' in the aftermath of Suez, arguing that for Britain, the crisis turned out almost to be a blessing in disguise, since it freed Britain from the American embrace in the Middle East. Thereafter, the British could, with little fear of American sanctions or pressure, act unilaterally in the region. In Chapter 15, Tony Stockwell challenges the oft-repeated notion that Suez marked a turning-point in

the moral disarmament of the British Empire. Stockwell pursues the argument that, notwithstanding Suez, the empire and imperial attitudes took a long time dying.

The collection is brought to a close by a chapter from Scott Lucas which reconsiders Suez in terms of the way in which regional and international projections of power 'intersected and collided'. He concludes that it was 'regional interactions that complicated projections of power', a finding which has relevance for the contemporary Middle East just as much as for the era of Suez.

Chapter 1

Prelude to the Suez Crisis: The Rise and Fall of British Dominance over the Suez Canal, 1869–1956

Steve Morewood

Most accounts of the Suez crisis commence with merely a tangential reference to Britain's long-standing military occupation of Egypt and associated dominance over the Suez Canal, but fail to comprehend that this historical prelude formed an essential ingredient in the crisis itself. Egyptian nationalists' seething resentment at Britain's impudent manipulation of the famous waterway to serve its geo-strategic interests finally boiled over when President Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956 before a hysterical crowd in Alexandria. This trigger for the crisis was long in coming, and signified the end of the British hold over Suez which had waxed and waned since 1945. Indeed, after the Second World War the Egyptians progressively turned the tables on the British, interpreting the Suez Canal Convention (1888) to suit their own interests, and aside from one brief but short-lived effort to reverse the situation, London felt obliged to accept the position, not least because Washington refused to play ball. Prior to 1945, however, Britain had successfully resisted all Egyptian efforts to claim the Canal, assumed Egypt's assigned role as its defender, interpreted the convention as it saw fit, for much of the time colluded with the Suez Canal Company to ensure the security of this shortcut of empire, and through the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 forged a perpetual alliance and Egyptian recognition that the Canal was a vital imperial highway for the British Empire and Commonwealth. This chapter will assess the various stages in the ascent and decline of British dominance over the Canal, culminating in the opening of the crisis that confirmed Britain's relegation to a second-rank power.

From British Occupation to World War

The French dreamed of a canal linking the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. Napoleon's engineers erroneously concluded in 1801 that there was a difference in sea levels which rendered a waterway impractical, thereby delaying commencement until 30 November 1854, when the Egyptian Khedive Mohammed Said Pasha granted a 99-year concession from its opening to Ferdinand de Lesseps, a former French consul in Egypt turned engineer who had astutely befriended the Khedive before he assumed power after finding his predecessors, Abbas and Mohammed Ali,

opposed to a canal, fearing it would compromise Egyptian independence. Before the Suez Canal became an established fact, British governments used every device short of war to try to prevent the project's realization. When de Lesseps travelled to London, he encountered discouraging noises from Palmerston and Clarendon, Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary respectively, who openly doubted whether a canal was technically feasible, and if it was, feared that it would remove Britain's existing commercial and maritime ascendancy. Nevertheless, de Lesseps pressed ahead, assured of a pool of Egyptian labour, and from 1858, of the diplomatic backing of his government. In November 1869, the Suez Canal opened, the first ship to traverse it being French, closely followed by a British vessel. At just over a hundred miles in length, it immediately removed the Cape of Good Hope route's advantage in freight carrying between Europe and the Far East.[1] 'Of his [de Lesseps'] creation,' wrote the senior British government director of the Canal Company in 1923, 'it may be said that French enterprise formed the artery and British commerce provided the blood which together nourished and developed the body of international seaborne trade between the old and the new worlds of the Eastern Hemisphere.'[2] Five-sevenths of the empire lay east of Suez. The Canal's arrival shortened the distances from the port of London substantially: to Bombay by 4543 miles, to Calcutta by 3667 miles, to Melbourne by 645 miles. Before 1914, India, the 'jewel of empire', accounted for over half of Canal traffic; trade with the Far East increased tenfold, and volume exports from Australasia became viable. By 1928, exports to Britain from India and Burma constituted 35.1 per cent of south–north traffic, falling to 32.3 per cent in 1932, at the bottom of the Great Depression, recovering to 33.1 per cent by 1937.[3] British-flagged ships became easily the largest users of Suez, an ascendency they would maintain until 1964,[4] thereby creating a vital British interest, raising the dilemma of how best to protect this critical artery, which became known as 'the spinal column of the British Empire' and its jugular vein.[5]

Two conflicts heightened British fears and paved the way for the occupation of Egypt, the only certain way to ensure control over the Canal. During the Franco-Prussian War, the French-dominated Suez Canal Company allowed the belligerents to use Suez. Indeed, the presence of French warships at the port of Suez so alarmed the Admiralty that it pressed for an international agreement on the neutrality of the Canal. During the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), the British government became so nervous that Russia might seize the Canal for military purposes, since Egypt remained technically part of the Ottoman Empire, that it issued a warning to St Petersburg: 'An attempt to blockade or otherwise to interfere with the Canal or

1 J. Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations 1800–1953* (London, 1954), pp. 61–71.

2 Malcolm, Memorandum on the Prolongation of the Concession to the Suez Canal Company, 3 October 1923, TNA, T206/21.

3 Exports from India and Burma via the Suez Canal 1928–37, TNA, T206/21.

4 The British percentage share of total tonnage actually peaked at 82.7 per cent in 1881, the year before the occupation. For most of the period under review, the figure remained in the 60s and 70s. By 1955, it had declined to 28.33 per cent.

5 Since the Suez Canal had no fixed structures, it could be widened and deepened relatively easily, and at various points the Canal Company introduced upgrading schemes to take into account trends in world shipping.

its approaches would be regarded … as a menace to India and as a grave injury to the commerce of the world.'[6] Although the Russians returned a conciliatory reply, British concerns over the security of Suez remained. Financial constraints meant the Canal could only accommodate large ships in single file outside of the lakes through which it passed (Lake Timsah and the Great and Little Bitter lakes) and eight crossing stations.[7] This characteristic held the advantage of averting collisions between passing ships, but also raised the prospect of the Canal being blocked, accidentally or deliberately, in its narrowest sections, to the grave detriment of British commerce, the Admiralty's capacity to redeploy warships and the War Office's ability to move troops to and from India and the Far East. In 1875, Disraeli famously purchased a 44 per cent stake in the Suez Canal Company. This gave the British government the largest holding – though an individual shareholder was entitled to a maximum of ten votes. From 1876, there were three official British government directors, the most senior of whom paid an annual visit to the Canal, plus, from 1884, after the board increased from 24 to 32 members, seven unofficial directors looking after British shipping interests, which was a greater representation than any other power. But this did not equate to dominance, and over several issues, such as Canal dues, the British voice often failed to carry at the Paris meetings of the Board or the Committee of Management.[8]

By the nineteenth century, the cardinal principle of British strategy in the eastern Mediterranean was the ability to protect the shortest route to India. For years the British Admiralty convinced itself that naval bases at Gibraltar and Malta were sufficient to prevent any occupation of Egypt by a hostile power. What it failed to anticipate was the development of an internal threat to Canal security as Colonel Arabi's nationalist movement, born in the autumn of 1881, reacted against Anglo-French Dual Control arising from Egypt's foreign debts with the rallying cry 'Egypt for the Egyptians'. Some historians suggest that, at best, the Suez Canal issue was a red herring designed to obscure underlying financial motives for British military intervention in Egypt.[9] In fact, the defence of Suez lay at the heart of British calculations. On 19 June 1882, nine days after anti-European rioting in Alexandria, the Admiralty, anticipating an invasion, drew up a memorandum in which the seizure of the Canal formed an integral part.[10] Again, on 13 July 1882 the Gladstone government formally proposed Anglo-French intervention to protect Suez, only to find that the French Chamber of Deputies failed to approve. Significantly, in August the Royal Navy began to assume control over Suez after Arabi threatened to sabotage the waterway. This was justified by the Khedive's induced decree which recognized that British military intervention was

6 Quoted in The Neutrality of the Canal, n.d., p. 3, TNA, T206/21.

7 The Canal itself was 87 miles long, but with the lakes, its entire length was just over a hundred miles.

8 The President and Director-General, invariably French, were the two most important officials of the company.

9 See P. Cain and A. Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688–2000* (London, 2001); P. Cain, 'Character and Imperialism: The British Financial Administration of Egypt, 1878–1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 34/2 (2006): 177–200.

10 Cooper Key, The Despatch of Turkish Troops to Egypt, 19 June 1882, TNA, CAB 37/8/41.

intended to restore order and authorized 'the occupation of all necessary points'.[11] As a result, the Canal was only closed for two days. Following a feint landing at Alexandria, General Wolseley's expeditionary force re-deployed to Ismailia, the central station of the Canal, whence it marched during the night of 12–13 September to surprise Arabi's force encamped at Tel-el-Kebir, which was routed within twenty minutes. Immediately a cavalry force was rushed to Cairo to secure the fresh water supply to Suez which emanated from the Sweet Water Canal between Ismailia and the capital. Two days later, Wolseley's main force entered Cairo, Arabi surrendered, and Britain's long-standing occupation of Egypt commenced. Although Britain promised to withdraw on innumerable occasions before 1914, the offer was never unconditional. In reality, Britain needed to maintain a garrison in Egypt as a guarantor, in the final resort, of its dominance over Suez. For instance, the Canal Convention (see below), while stipulating that troopships should pass through as quickly as possible, specified no limits on the numbers on board. Without a military deterrent, an enemy might easily seize the waterway. 'It may be contended', wrote the Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the War Office in 1901, 'that so long as we are in military occupation of Egypt, no hostile Power is likely to risk troops in the Canal.'[12]

Until April 1904, France was viewed as the power most likely to disrupt British communications via Suez. Indeed, they had a Trojan horse in the form of the Suez Canal Company, whose founder, de Lesseps, had threatened to block the Canal in mid-1882. In September 1882, the British directors of the company warned their government:

> The events of the past few months have shown that the Suez Canal Company have it in their power to act with considerable hostile effect against any power using the Canal whose political designs they may wish to frustrate, and more especially against England. The possible case of a war between France and England … might lead the company to block the Canal.[13]

Briefly, the idea of a parallel English canal was mooted, before financial considerations ruled it out. The Franco-Russian military convention of August 1892, leading on to a full-blown alliance, was a worrying development. The French Mediterranean fleet, boasting 19 ironclads with naval bases at Algiers, Bizerte and Corsica, could potentially combine with the Russian Black Sea fleet to wrest from Britain its maritime domination of the eastern Mediterranean. Already in 1887 the Ottoman Empire had succumbed to Franco-Russian pressure in rejecting Britain's terms to evacuate Egypt, not least because they included the right of re-entry under certain conditions. The prospect of a Mediterranean naval war with France and Russia filled the British with dread. Joe Chamberlain publicly conceded in 1893 that if this scenario materialized, then 'the British navy would have to cut and run – if it

11 Malcolm, Neutrality of the Canal, 21 November 1938, TNA, T206/21.

12 G.F. Wilson to Foreign Office, 4 November 1901, TNA, ADM 1/8877.

13 J. Stokes and C. Rivers Wilson, Future Administration of the Suez Canal, 16 September 1882, TNA, FO 881/4829.

could run'.[14] Privately, the Admiralty shared this view and engaged in a frantic naval build-up in an effort to bluff Paris and St Petersburg. But if this failed, then the War Office envisaged a nightmare scenario whereby the French and Russians would send troopships through Suez, seize the Canal and then march on Cairo.[15]

In 1895, the Admiralty drew up a memorandum in response to Lord Salisbury's directive to investigate the problem of seizing the Dardanelles. Its conclusion was:

> by taking Egypt absolutely, we would secure what we have long sought to maintain by keeping Russia out of Constantinople. The advantages of holding the Suez Canal are bound up in the question of Egypt … it may be said that if there were no Suez Canal, it would not be long before there was no India.[16]

The Prime Minister was persuaded to abandon the Constantinople strategy of preventing a Russian naval entry into the Mediterranean, which the Franco-Russian Alliance rendered impractical, in favour of holding Egypt.[17] Given the fraught state of Anglo-French relations, which reached their nadir over Fashoda, there was no official announcement of this change. With Imperial Germany emerging as a threat, it became imperative to mend fences with France, which was achieved in the Entente Cordiale of April 1904. This removed the long-standing bickering over Britain's continued military occupation of Egypt and brought into force the Suez Canal Convention when Britain waived the precondition that its occupation must have ended first.

The convention, concluded at Constantinople on 29 October 1888, decreed that the Suez Canal must remain open to all vessels, irrespective of their flag, in peace and war, and could not be subjected to a blockade. The signatories were Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia, Spain, Turkey and Holland, which were afforded the right to station two guard ships at the entry ports. It was very much a Great Power arrangement which, in effect, left the British, the only party with troops and warships on the spot, as the guardian and interpreter of the convention.[18] This reality was abundantly demonstrated during the Great War. At the start, in August 1914, the British persuaded the Egyptian government to issue a proclamation allowing the removal of enemy ships from the Canal and granting British officials the rights of war in Egyptian ports and territory. On 5 August, German warships at Port Said tried to transit the Canal, leading to a dispute between the Canal Company, which wanted to allow access, and the British authorities, who did not. Entry was refused on the basis that the warships had violated Article IV of the convention, barring acts of hostility in Canal waters, since they were communicating the movements of British

14 Quoted in D. Facey-Crowther, 'British Military Policy and the Defence of Egypt 1882–1914' (Ph.D, King's College, London, 1969), p. 69.

15 Wilson to Foreign Office, 4 November 1901, TNA, ADM 1/8877.

16 Report by Director of Naval Intelligence, November 1895, TNA, ADM 116/3089.

17 A.J. Marder, *British Naval Policy 1880–1905: The Anatomy of British Sea Power* (London, 1940), p. 579. See also K.M. Wilson, 'Constantinople or Cairo: Lord Salisbury and the Partition of the Ottoman Empire 1886–1897' in K.M. Wilson (ed.), *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Middle East: The Anglo-Egyptian Experience 1882–1982* (London, 1983).

18 There was talk of an international administration, which never materialized.

warships. Twelve days later, a German cargo vessel, held up at Port Said, paid the dues and requested a pilot. This led the British and French consulates at the port to air their suspicion that the captain was intent on sinking his vessel to block the Canal. When the Canal Company inclined towards allowing entry, in the absence of sufficient proof, British troops bestrode the gangway, stopping the pilot from boarding, and forced the captain to land. Lip service was paid to the convention, but always based on an interpretation which favoured the allied cause. Thus, on 30 September 1914, all enemy vessels at Port Said were taken outside the three-mile limit, where they were seized by a British cruiser and escorted to the Prize Court at Alexandria. The convention did not allow Canal ports to be used as ports of refuge, though in actuality this occurred because free passage through Suez was denied.[19]

Before the war, in compliance with the 1888 convention, the Canal Zone was never garrisoned, and there was concern that the small size of the British garrison in Egypt meant no reinforcements could be spared to defend Suez, providing Turkey with a three-week window of opportunity.[20] In the event, the delayed entry of Turkey provided ample opportunity to bring in troops from India. Following Turkey's entrance in November 1914, it became apparent that an attack on the Canal was being prepared. Article IX of the convention allowed local authorities to organize defence, leading to collaboration between the Canal Company and the British military and naval authorities. From 19 December 1914, Suez came under Anglo-French military control. Warships at the entry ports, armed guards aboard ships, patrol craft, aerial reconnaissance and inspection of cargoes were the outcome. Within a year, owing to the denial of entry to ships of the Central Powers and the dangerous passage through the Mediterranean, Canal traffic was down by over a quarter. By the start of 1915, a motley collection of British, Australian, Indian and Egyptian troops, comprising 24 infantry battalions, a camel corps, a mountain brigade, a detachment of the Royal Flying Corps and a squadron of French seaplanes, constituted the Canal Defence Force, assisted by allied warships which entered Suez while British destroyers cruised between the banks. Their combined efforts thwarted the Turkish attack by over 12,000 troops, when it came, on 2–3 February, with the three pontoons which crossed the Canal at night neutralized once their presence was known. Navigation was only interrupted for one day, after which allied and neutral ships traversed Suez. Thereafter, passage was only allowed during daylight hours, ships passed in convoys, and the Canal banks were patrolled regularly to guard against the laying of mines. Britain's transgression of the convention saw its dominance over Suez reflected in a 79.5 per cent share of Canal traffic in 1918.[21]

The genesis of the Palestine campaign by the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (actually British and Australian forces) lay in the desire to provide defence in depth

19 See D.A. Farnie, *East and West of Suez: The Suez Canal in History 1854–1956* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 530–38.

20 See Report and Minutes of Evidence of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed by the Prime Minister to Consider the Military Requirements of the Empire as Affected by Egypt and the Sudan, 1907, TNA, WO 106/6307.

21 Defence of the Suez Canal: Narrative of Events January 25–February 8 1915, TNA, CAB 37/125/15; P.G. Elgood, *The Army in Egypt 1914–18* (Oxford, 1924).

to Suez to prevent any recurrence of an attack via the Sinai Peninsula. This was achieved by autumn 1918, with Palestine becoming a Class A mandate under British jurisdiction. In December 1914, the nominal Turkish suzerainty was annulled by Britain, and Egypt was declared a British protectorate. London wished Egypt's new status to continue, and towards this end procured formal recognition from the Great Powers, including the United States. The peace settlement recognized the new status quo and acknowledged that Britain had inherited Turkey's rights under the 1888 convention to defend the Canal, since Egypt, without a navy and possessing a miniscule army, was in no position to undertake this role. The Treaty Revision Committee, one of several established to examine how best to secure British interests after the war, recommended that the convention remain untouched.[22] It seemed as if British dominance over Suez was secure. Then came the rude awakening of 1919, prompting a recasting of existing assumptions.

The Road to the 1936 Treaty and Beyond

Between 1919 and 1922, Britain faced a series of revolts across its empire involving Egypt, Iraq, Afghanistan, India and Ireland which threatened to tear it asunder. In the event, only Afghanistan and southern Ireland were relinquished. The Egyptian challenge was dealt with severely utilizing the British garrison and Dominion troops yet to return home. In its aftermath, the Lloyd George coalition government sought a political accommodation with the nationalists, since maintaining a huge garrison was deemed financially unviable. The Milner Mission, sent out to Egypt to recommend a solution, suggested that British forces be confined to the Canal Zone, which elated the Egyptian nationalists but fell foul of the Chiefs of Staff's insistence that control over Cairo remained essential, not least because of the Sweet Water Canal which provided fresh water supplies to the zone. At the start of 1922, the British government issued a statement setting out conditions which must be satisfied if Egyptian independence were to be granted, which became the basis for the four reserved points of the 28 February 1922 Declaration, including the safety of imperial communications, a euphemism for continued British dominance over the Suez Canal. In 1923, at the London Imperial Conference, an unofficial British proposal to extend the Canal concession found favour with Dominion Prime Ministers, but was not pursued, in the certain knowledge that no Egyptian government could entertain it.[23] Lest other powers concluded that the British grip had loosened, a circular note warned them of the 'special relations' between Britain and Egypt which meant that the British government 'will regard as an unfriendly act any attempt at interference in the affairs of Egypt by another Power and that they will consider any aggression against the territory of Egypt as an act to be repelled with all the means at their command'.[24]

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22 Final Report of the Treaty Revision Committee, 31 August 1918, TNA, CO 323/777.

23 Malcolm to Baldwin, 3 October 1923, T206/12. An official approach to the same end had been made previously in 1909 and rejected by Egypt.

24 The British Ambassador (Washington) to the Secretary of State, 16 March 1922, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1922*, vol. II (Washington, DC, 1938), no. 194.

The reserved points were to be resolved by treaty, but five attempts to attain a settlement failed. In essence, the immovable object met the unstoppable force as extreme Egyptian nationalism, embodied by the Wafd Party, formed in 1918, refused to compromise while the Chiefs of Staff refused to dilute their strategic desiderata. The Foreign Office attempted to mediate between the two, taking the view that an imperfect treaty was better than no treaty at all and would place Britain's military occupation on a legal footing. In 1924, the Wafdist Premier, Saad Zaghlul Pasha, whose declared objective was 'complete independence', entertained hopes that the first Labour government would be amenable to withdrawing the British Army of Occupation (which remained its official title) to Palestine. During 1921, the Labour leader, James Ramsay MacDonald, toured Egypt and sympathized with Egyptian aspirations. Once Labour was elected, in January 1924, however, 'British relations with Egypt changed very little'.[25] In the autumn, treaty negotiations were held in London. Zaghlul wanted British forces removed from Egypt to Palestine, arguing that, together with the Royal Navy's domination of the approaches to Suez, this would be sufficient to protect the Canal. Zaghlul also wanted Britain to abandon its claim to protect Suez, which could be guarded by Egyptian troops, with British reinforcements called upon where necessary. Ramsay MacDonald, apprised of the views of the Chiefs of Staff, responded in uncompromising terms: the suggested arrangement was 'impractical'; the 1888 convention was no guarantee of security; Egypt might not be on Britain's side in a conflict; the House of Commons would throw out any such proposals.[26]

Before 1936, the closest the parties were to securing a treaty came in 1929–30, when the Labour government elected to take great risks, sacking the imperial diehard High Commissioner in Cairo, George Lloyd, and ignoring the counsel of the Chiefs of Staff. John Murray, head of the Egyptian Department of the Foreign Office, voiced an optimism which proved to be misplaced:

> We here in the Foreign Office are absolutely convinced that the proposals in themselves are sound, that they will enormously contribute to the safety of the Suez Canal, and that by placing Anglo-Egyptian relations on a different and more harmonious basis will contribute directly to promoting the prospects of successful negotiations between the [Canal] company and the Egyptian government for the extension of the concession when those negotiations take place … the transfer of the troops to the neighbourhood of the Canal is bound to react directly and indirectly to the benefit and advantage of the canal company…[27]

Negotiations broke down not over defence issues (British forces were to move quickly from the main cities, Cairo and Alexandria, to the Canal Zone and the treaty would only last for ten years), which satisfied the Wafd government, but over control of the Sudan. Not until January 1936 did Britain, under the Conservative-dominated National Government of Stanley Baldwin, agree to another round of negotiations in

25 J. Shepherd and K. Laybourn, *Britain's First Labour Government* (London, 2006), p. 152.

26 Record of Third Conference, 10 Downing Street, 3 October 1924, TNA, FO 407/199.

27 Murray to Malcolm, 5 August 1929, TNA, T206/7.

the face of Egyptian rioting. The unique context to this sixth attempt was provided by Italy's invasion of neighbouring Abyssinia, whose campaign featured the brutal subjugation of resistance through spraying mustard gas from aeroplanes. This frightened the Egyptians, who were now willing to see the British as the lesser evil.

Article 9 of the draft treaty of 1930 envisaged a situation in ten years when the Egyptians would be in a position, by themselves, to ensure the security of the Canal. If there was any dispute between the parties over this issue, then the League of Nations would arbitrate. Naturally, the Egyptians wanted to retain the clause intact. Equally, the British service chiefs were determined to remove it. Indeed, the Chiefs of Staff insisted that Egypt must recognize that Britain had assumed Turkey's role as the defender of the Canal and grant the right to impose martial law in the Canal Zone. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, recognized that no Egyptian would swallow desiderata framed without obscuring adornments: 'In the case of neither of them would it be possible for the Egyptians to accept a text which set forth our requirements in language so clear that its effects would at once be apparent to everybody.'[28] Accordingly, the Foreign Office redraft of Article 9 referred to 'all steps necessary' to cover martial law. Nahas Pasha, the Wafdist prime minister, argued that there was no question that Egypt, as the territorial power, was conferred the right to defend the Suez Canal by its running through Egyptian territory and by the 1888 convention. Article XIV gave Egypt the primary right to defend the Canal, whilst Turkey acceded to Britain the right to co-operate with Egypt should it prove unable to mount a successful defence unilaterally. He objected to the British draft of Article 9 of the proposed treaty, which:

> … would mean that Great Britain, as an ally, would have more extensive rights than Turkey as a suzerain power. Indeed, Great Britain would, in that event, be deemed as having legally and practically established her protectorate over the Suez Canal, and hence over Egypt, since the Canal is but an integral part of Egypt, however much it may be a means of communication between the various parts of the British Empire.[29]

On 8 June 1936, the Chiefs of Staff convened under the chairmanship of Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield, First Lord of the Admiralty, who took exception to any suggestion that Egypt might ultimately become responsible for the defence of Suez. 'It was impossible', he insisted, 'to envisage that Egypt could be the sole defender of the Canal, for Egypt must always rely on the co-operation of British sea power for her defence.'[30] Sir Miles Lampson, the British High Commissioner in Cairo, had suggested that Egypt would, in practice, remain dependent on Britain, but Chatfield still considered the treaty a gamble.[31]

Eden wrote in his memoirs that the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, signed on 26 August 1936, was 'one of the very few worthwhile international settlements negotiated in that time of international lawlessness'.[32]

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28 Eden, Anglo-Egyptian Conversations, Cabinet Paper, 1 May 1936, TNA, CAB 64/32.

29 Nahas Pasha, Defence of the Suez Canal, 8 June 1936, TNA, CAB 64/32.

30 Chiefs of Staff meeting, 8 June 1936, TNA, CAB 64/32.

31 Ibid.

32 Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators* (London, 1962), pp. 390, 394.

A closer reading suggests a less conclusive victory for the British, who had scored an immediate triumph but stored up problems for the future. Article 7 was contradictory: recognizing the vital importance of Suez to British imperial communications whilst also conceding it was an integral part of Egypt. On 24 November 1936, Eden assured the House of Commons that 'the Canal will be adequately protected by the Alliance for all time'.[33] Yet although the British envisaged the alliance as perpetual, this assumption was undermined by the twenty-year time limit on the treaty. The size of the normal peacetime garrison was restricted to 10,000 troops and 400 pilots (leaving considerable leeway for support staff), and British forces were to vacate the main cities for the Canal Zone once new accommodation became available. In practice, British ascendency continued. Mussolini maintained his threat to Egypt from an oversized Libyan garrison, leading successive Egyptian governments to concede that an international emergency, which allowed the restriction to be breached, was at hand. Again, Egyptian insistence that they funded and built the new barracks and supporting infrastructure in the Canal Zone proved a spectacular own goal, retarding progress and meaning that no re-deployment occurred.

On 24 January 1936, after Britain agreed to enter into treaty negotiations with Egypt, George Edgar Bonnet, Director-General of the Suez Canal Company, told a Board meeting that he:

> … had come to the conclusion that the company would be well advised to establish new and more cordial relations with the Egyptian government than had been the case in the past. He thought that the company might well follow the example of the British government and treat Egypt no longer as a conquered country but, realising its virtual independence, should deal with the Egyptian ministers on the basis of this new status.[34]

This changed attitude led first to the convention of 1 July 1936, whereby the company agreed to pay the Egyptian government an annual royalty of £E200,000 and increase Egyptian personnel in the Canal Service to 25 per cent of the total by 1958. Signifying that the company felt its fortunes were tied up with Britain's, ratification was delayed until the Anglo-Egyptian treaty was concluded. Egyptian nationalists had always been enraged at having to pay Canal dues for Egyptian vessels to pass through their own territory. In another convention, signed on 9 June 1937, the company went some way to ameliorate this grievance, excepting ships under 300 tons and any above this weight up to a total of 3500 tons. From 1 May 1938, the company would pay the Egyptian government a voluntary annual rental of £E300,000 in compensation for the revenue lost from the sale of the Khedive's shares in 1876. In addition, the percentage of Egyptian employees would rise to 33 per cent by 1958, and the company conceded that there should be two Egyptian directors (five were originally requested) added to the Board.[35] Sir Ian Malcolm, the British government director, found it ironic that

33 Quoted in Farnie, *East and West of Suez*, p. 605.

34 Malcolm, Confidential Suez Canal Commercial Report Number 6, 24 January 1936, TNA, T206/19.

35 Farnie, *East and West of Suez*, pp. 604–7.

Egypt owned no shares, the usual qualification for directorships.[36] In July 1938, Sidky Pasha and Cherif Sabry Pasha, two prominent political figures, took up the appointments. Egypt had now got a foot in the door, and after 1945, in a different international environment, would be in a position to prise it open further.

The great dread of the Admiralty was that the Canal would be blocked, thereby preventing the passage of warships. During the Great War, a merchant vessel, the *Goeben*, had temporarily closed Suez before it righted itself. Thereafter, the Senior British Naval Officer, Port Said, kept abreast of the geological conditions. Should a wreck block a sandy section, then a bypass channel could easily be dredged around it. But if a vessel sank in a rocky section, especially on a bend, then the Canal was liable to be inaccessible to deep-draught vessels, like warships, for some time.[37] Admiralty planning between the world wars was dominated by the prospect of conflict with Imperial Japan. The nightmare scenario was of a Japanese merchant ship, carrying an ostensibly innocent heavy cargo such as cement or iron ore, deliberately sinking itself in a rocky section to prevent Britain from sending naval reinforcements via the fastest route. Contingency planning envisaged combining the Home and Mediterranean fleets and sending them to the Singapore naval base via the Suez route, the fastest possible. In 1934, the Suez Canal Defence Plan was drawn up between the Chiefs of Staff and the commanders in Egypt. Should hostilities threaten with Japan, then the Canal would be taken over to ensure the security of the main fleet. It was anticipated that a fortnight would elapse before all the warships were safely through. The plan was highly secret, envisaging a takeover of the waterway which contravened the 1888 convention. For this reason, Egyptian governments, prone to leakage, were excluded from all knowledge of what was planned, while the Canal Company was only consulted on certain aspects without giving away the reasons. By the late 1930s, however, the failure to appease fascist Italy and Nazi Germany meant that, in actuality, few warships could be spared, and in so far as its original purpose was concerned, the plan became a white elephant. In the event, when the *Prince of Wales* went to its doom in late 1941, it reached Singapore via the Cape of Good Hope route, the Suez alternative through the Mediterranean having become unsafe.[38]

Although conflict did not come to the Mediterranean until June 1940, in practice, with the connivance of the Egyptian government and Suez Canal Company, Britain established dominance over the waterway from the outbreak of war in Europe the previous September. On 3 September, double floating booms were deployed at Port Said and Suez to facilitate the inspection of ships' cargoes, which took place beyond the three-mile limit, to conform with the 1888 convention. From 10 September, it became compulsory for ships to make a detailed declaration of their cargo. During 14 September, the Egyptian Military Governor declared the closure of the entrance ports from sunrise to sunset. When Italy came in, on 10 June 1940, a boom ship enforced closure at night. The dangerous situation created by Mussolini's quest for

36 Malcolm to Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 6 September 1937, TNA, T160/825.

37 Rear Admiral Learsmouth to Malcolm, 16 April 1923, TNA, T260/12.

38 See S. Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt 1935–1940* (London, 2005), ch. 10.

glory and France's exit from the war saw a drop in Canal tonnage of 54 per cent during 1940, the largest ever. Attacks by the Luftwaffe between 1941 and 1942 succeeded in closing Suez on several occasions, but never for more than a few days. In truth, however, the Canal lost much of its importance as a passageway from and into the Mediterranean save for the occasional warship or military convoy. Reinforcements and supplies for Egypt, to serve in the Western Desert, finished their journey from England via the Cape route at the port of Suez, whose capacity and communications thereto were increased proportionately. For instance, an oil pipeline was laid along the Canal from Suez to Port Said so that fleet tankers could fill up without the need to enter the Canal, where they were vulnerable to air attack.[39]

As the Middle East Command, created in August 1939, expanded, so too did the Canal Zone. By the climax of the Desert War, the latter had been transformed into a massive military base incorporating 150 depots, including Tel-el-Kebir, which boasted a circumference of 28 miles. Its establishment was a blatant infringement of the 1888 convention, signalling Britain's determination, with critical American support, to win the Mediterranean war. Such was the extent of the development of the Canal Zone beyond what was envisaged in the 1936 treaty that one authority refers to the creation of 'a state within a state'.[40] Indeed, the fall of France saw the administrative headquarters of the Canal Company transferred to London, where it was run by the British directors. In spring 1944, Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, touched a raw nerve when he insensitively referred to 'the Egyptian sovereign power, whom we have protected against all German and Italian assaults', causing pandemonium in the Egyptian parliament, wherein opposition members insisted that Britain had merely defended its own imperial interests.[41]

There was a fleeting perceived opportunity to assuage resurgent Egyptian nationalism at the end of the war, with the establishment of an international authority to oversee the Canal. This idea was mooted by the Suez Canal Committee, but the Foreign Office took the view that the matter was best left to Britain and Egypt.[42] Nor were the British enamoured by President Truman's proposal to transfer control to the newly formed United Nations. Instead, Canal Company control resumed on its pre-war basis, rekindling Egyptian resentment at its healthy profits (between 1928 and 1939 producing a return of 67.2 per cent) and unwillingness to let the Egyptian government receive more than a token amount notwithstanding the fact that it was an Egyptian company. The scene was set for a renewal of the Egyptian demand for unfettered independence, which meant total British withdrawal, fortified by the wishful thinking that the new United Nations Organization would see that justice was done in disputes between small and greater powers.

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39 For the wartime development of the Suez base, see I.S.O. Playfair, *History of the Second World War: The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. II (London, 1956), ch. XI; Farnie, *East and West of Suez*, ch. 33.

40 Ibid., p. 632.

41 *The Times*, 1 May 1944, p. 1.

42 P.S. Schrivener minute, 3 August 1945, TNA, FO 371/45923.

After 1945

After the Second World War, the Suez Canal regained its status as a thriving waterway. By 1953 the traffic was 30 per cent greater than in 1939. Oil tankers to and from the Persian Gulf came to dominate, as Britain, short of dollars, drew from sterling sources, but there were also liners, aircraft carriers, warships, troopships and store ships connected with various military campaigns in the Far East. With the onset of the Cold War, the Suez Canal Zone became a front line in the eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, its importance as an effective base for Middle East defence came to outweigh the maintenance of free traffic through the Canal as an imperative objective of British policy. This paradox created an opportunity for Egypt to interfere with traffic to suit its national interests and as a means to express its sovereignty. Ironically, therefore, despite the maintenance of a huge garrison in the zone, which could easily have overwhelmed such Egyptian armed forces as were available, the British largely restricted themselves to diplomatic protests at perceived infringements of the 1888 convention, including interference with British vessels, and in practice the Egyptians were allowed to get away with it. The latter recognized that the world order had changed and were careful to reassure the United States, in a note of 28 June 1948, that their merchantmen and warships were free to use the Canal.[43]

By 1945, the Suez Canal Zone had become Britain's largest overseas military base. Boasting ten airfields, 34 military stations, intersecting communications, modern barracks and unrivalled training facilities, it provided the capacity to defend the Middle East in the event of a conventional war.[44] Yet the clock was now ticking towards the December 1956 expiry date for the 1936 treaty, which weighed increasingly on the minds of British decision-makers. Briefly, the new Labour government invested hope in the idea of releasing Egypt from its defence obligations for the remainder of the treaty in exchange for a 99-year lease on the coveted areas of the zone, but this proved a non-starter.[45] In May 1946, after Egypt demanded withdrawal, Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, announced that Britain was committed to evacuation in stages, culminating in a pull-out from the Suez base, in advance of the negotiations to revise the treaty. The reality was that such a commitment was hedged with conditions, including the maintenance of defence installations, freedom of movement for British forces and the building of a regional headquarters in the Canal Zone. The retention of 'non-combatant' forces would, in effect, allow the British to maintain a foothold which they could expand in the event of an international emergency.[46] Egypt's decision to terminate negotiations and refer the issue to the United Nations represented a defeat for British diplomacy. By December 1946, there were 193,398 British troops in the Canal Zone, but despite this

43 W.E. Hewitt, United States Rights under the Suez Canal Convention, 27 July 1956, *FRUS, 1955–57, Volume XVI: Suez Crisis July 26–December 31, 1956* (Washington, DC, 1990), no. 9.

44 W.R. Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945–1951* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 720–21.

45 H. Nasser, *Britain and the Egyptian Nationalist Movement 1936–1952* (Reading, 1994), pp. 137–8.

46 Ibid., pp. 137–40.

embarrassment, Britain managed to avert the wrath of the Security Council, whose verdict that Britain was not in breach of the letter and spirit of the United Nations Charter through its continued military presence in Egypt came in September 1947, to the consternation of Egypt. Another Egyptian defeat came following the Egyptian Companies Law, passed on 20 January 1947, which stipulated that 40 per cent or 13 of the Canal Company's directors must be Egyptian within three months, and 75 per cent of its personnel within three years. The Canal Company responded defiantly that the law did not apply to it.[47] Increasingly, however, Britain and the company were identified in Egyptian minds as colluders and obstacles to true independence, despite their insistence that they were acting unselfishly in the wider causes of international peace and world shipping.

The belated British military withdrawal from the main cities to the Canal Zone early in 1947 proved insufficient to quell rising Egyptian nationalism, which sought compensating redress for the humiliation of defeat by Israel. On 28 May 1947, the Egyptian government demanded ten day's notice from any power wishing to send a warship through the Canal. Further signifying a shift in the balance of power was the introduction by Egypt, on 15 May 1948, the day after the outbreak of the first Arab–Israeli war, of the inspection and searching of vessels transiting the Canal, echoing British practice during the Second World War. The treatment of Israeli-bound cargoes as contraband elicited diplomatic protests from Britain and the United States which were without effect, Egypt maintaining that Port Said and Suez were as much Egyptian ports as entry points into the Canal. Despite France and the United Nations joining the growing chorus of complaints, the Egyptians remained defiant, extending the restrictions to oil tankers following the ignominious Arab defeat in the war as a means of continuing the fight against Israel by other means. After Egypt extended its territorial waters to six miles in the Gulf of Suez on 15 January 1951, Israel maintained that Egypt was mounting a blockade and did not concede that Cairo could still exercise belligerent rights because the war was not officially over.[48] Egypt invoked Article X of the 1888 convention which justified measures of self-defence, ignoring, like the British in the world wars, the overriding spirit of freedom of navigation irrespective of flag in peace and war, and Article XI, which, contradictorily, forbade such measures. In response, Britain elected to pursue the UN route rather than take unilateral action. A Security Council resolution moved by Britain, France and the United States which was passed on 1 September 1951 rejected Egypt's interpretation, but given the unwillingness to go beyond diplomatic condemnation and despite Egyptian officials acting under the full gaze of powerful British armed forces, Cairo's defiance went unchecked.[49]

In January 1950, the Wafd returned to power on a slogan of 'evacuation'. The new government was intransigent over the removal of restrictions on Israeli-bound shipping through Suez, and defiantly intensified them. Unlike the French, the Foreign Office's law officers unexpectedly reported that Egypt retained belligerent rights arising from the inconclusive end of the 1948–49 Arab–Israeli war, a view reached

47 Farnie, *East and West of Suez*, p. 638.

48 An armistice rather than a peace treaty.

49 Farnie, *East and West of Suez*, ch. 35.

independently by the American State Department's legal advisers.[50] Nahas Pasha, once again prime minister, was not persuaded by arguments that the Soviet Union posed a grave danger to Egypt, which accordingly should be amenable to joining a Middle East version of NATO for mutual defence against the red menace. By late 1950, British forces in the Canal Zone, far exceeding the limits set by the 1936 treaty, were an intolerable provocation to Egyptian self-esteem. Events in Iran inspired Egyptian radicalism, and in spring 1951 there was open talk of the nationalization of the Suez Canal.[51] On 16 November 1950, Nahas told his parliament that the now despised treaty was null and void without officially abrogating it, which he finally did on 8 October 1951, encouraged by the Attlee government's faint-hearted response to the Abadan crisis.[52] In January 1952, the anti-British incidents in Cairo and the Canal Zone led to a crisis. There was a strike of Egyptians employed to moor and unmoor ships waiting at Port Said to form convoys, which could have brought the Canal to a standstill but for the intervention of British warships which took over this responsibility. At the same time, Britain reinforced the 43,000 troops in the Canal Zone by 40,000. 'We do not seek to be masters of Egypt,' the Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, assured the US Congress. 'We are there only as servants and guardians of the commerce of the world.'[53] This moment of fortitude was brief, not least because the Canal Company, wishing to be non-political, was reluctant to authorize more drastic steps, such as the British occupation of Port Said.

Egyptian contraband restrictions prevented British oil tankers from carrying crude oil through Suez to the mainly British-owned refineries at Haifa. This impediment, in conjunction with the closure of the Kirkuk–Haifa pipeline, resulted in a significant dollar loss which Britain could ill afford. The Foreign Office mooted the possibility of challenging the Egyptian blockade by sending a Haifa-bound tanker through the Canal escorted by a British warship.[54] The British Embassy in Cairo advised that Egyptian customs officials and police at Port Said could easily be overpowered to gain entry into the Canal, and the twelve-hour passage was liable to be completed without the Egyptian government being able to mount an effective military response.[55] However, the ambassador, Sir Ralph Stevenson, sounded a cautionary note. The element of surprise ought to ensure success on this occasion, but for the breach to become truly effective, another tanker needed to be sent through. For political reasons, the Egyptians were bound to resist any repeat, which would 'cause a showdown between us'.[56] In a further telegram, Stevenson warned that Egypt had already secured wide Arab sympathy over the tanker issue. If the scheme was implemented, he feared that 'the tendency of the Arab states to draw away from

50 Foreign Office, Notes for Egypt debate, 19 March 1951, TNA, FO 141/1447.

51 Chapman Andrews (Cairo) to Foreign Office, 20 March 1951, TNA, FO 371/90205.

52 Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, pp. 732–5.

53 *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1951, p. 7.

54 Roger Owen, Foreign Office, to Captain M.E. Butler Bowden, Ministry of Defence, 25 May 1951, TNA, FO 141/1447.

55 J. Wall minute, 5 June 1951, TNA, FO 141/1447.

56 Stevenson (Cairo) to Foreign Office, 13 June 1951, TNA, FO 141/1447.

Egypt, of which there has already been some sign … may be strangled at birth'.[57] As a result, the proposals were quietly dropped, further signifying British weakness.

The Free Officers revolution in July 1952 brought down the corrupt and discredited Egyptian monarchy under the bloated King Farouk and instigated a military dictatorship which was determined to be rid of the British once and for all. The British had always been wary of 'the enemy within', recognizing that dangers lurked within the army ranks, but by this time the emasculating British Military Mission, established under the 1936 treaty, and associated limitations on armament purchases, had disappeared. Soon the new regime was making threatening noises. The Free Officers' leader, President Neguib, informed an Italian reporter on 12 November 1953: 'The British have to evacuate our country whether an agreement is reached or not. Our patience has its limits.'[58] After meeting the Labour MP Richard Crossman, Neguib remarked: 'Concerning the Suez Canal question, I told him that we have said our last word in the matter, that we will not accept any solution prejudicing our independence and sovereignty, and that we are proceeding towards the fulfilment of our aims in every respect.'[59] The new government conspicuously created a Suez Canal Department attached to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to signal it meant business. British decision-makers soon faced a choice between remaining in the Canal Zone or reaching an accommodation with the new government leading to evacuation in the hope of transforming deteriorating Anglo-Egyptian relations. The continued importance of the Suez Canal to Britain, especially as a lifeline for oil from the Persian Gulf, tended to be lost or downplayed in the discussions leading to the Suez Canal Base Agreement. Rather, the wider setting of the Cold War predominated. The Soviets' gaining of a hydrogen bomb facilitated a reassessment of the strategic value of the Suez base. The view was taken that its value was much reduced by the prospect of a knock-out blow from a Soviet first nuclear strike, while this might even be provoked by the presence of British forces there. The new realities promoted a rethink of the position and helped to provide the rationale for withdrawal.[60] The notion of maintaining the base installations for possible reactivation began to hold sway in discussions as a means of swallowing the bitter pill of evacuation from the Canal Zone.[61]

The veteran civil servant Lord Hankey,[62] formerly secretary to the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence and now a commercial British director on the

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57 Stevenson (Cairo) to Foreign Office, 22 October 1951, TNA, FO 141/1447.

58 Quoted in Foreign Office Research Department, Egyptian Demands for Evacuation, December 1953, TNA, FO 371/10874.

59 Ibid.

60 J. Abadi, *Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East 1947–1971* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), pp. 163–8.

61 See various documents in J. Kent (ed.), *British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B, Volume 4: Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East Part II, 1949–1953* (London, 1998).

62 Hankey, nearing retirement, became the senior British government director in 1938 to secure his family's financial future, standing down during the war, before regaining the lucrative position between 1945–48, then becoming a commercial director; J.F. Naylor, 'Maurice Hankey', in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), p. 56.

Suez Canal Company Board, was almost a lone voice attempting to swim against the tide of evacuation. In February 1953, he wrote at length to Sir Anthony Eden, serving his third term as Foreign Secretary, after his eighth tour of the Canal, which was 'marred by a new and sinister feature, the shadow of an impending evacuation of the British forces – "operation scuttle"'. Hankey warned Eden that 'Her Majesty's Government were heading straight for a disaster far more serious than the evacuation of Abadan in its material and moral consequences, and calculated to shatter what remains of British prestige throughout the world.' Shipping tonnage through Suez was now considerably greater than in 1939, with British ships taking around a third share, not least because the Canal had been widened and deepened, a bypass channel opened, and traffic was moved by convoy. 'All this', insisted Hankey, 'involves foresight, knowledge of world shipping, able and experienced officials and experts and continuous drive; qualities which Egypt, an almost non-maritime Power, does not yet possess in high degree.' He conceded that after the May 1949 agreement between Egypt and the Canal Company Egyptians were now filling replacement posts, but considered them incapable of running the Canal. Hankey ended his diatribe with a call to take a firm stand: 'If we cannot hold the Suez Canal the jugular vein of world and Empire shipping communications, what can we hold?'[63] Julian Amery, co-leader of the Suez Group, put similar views to Eden in a memorandum which warned that once British forces were removed, the Canal became vulnerable to nationalization.[64] Such views cut no ice with the Foreign Office, which regarded them as silly. Eden's reply to Hankey was couched in diplomatic language: 'We shall do our best to ensure free and unhampered use of the Suez Canal at all times.' But circumstances had changed: Egypt must be treated as independent, and 'it is the policy of [Britain and the United States] to ensure the voluntary association of Egypt with the West in preparing to defend the Middle East against outside aggression'.[65] 'It is useless', insisted the head of the African Department, 'to maintain troops [in the Canal Zone] simply to be shot at.' The presence of 80,000 troops at enormous financial cost simply irritated the Egyptians and the Americans, who were threatening to supplant British influence in the Middle East, and did not confer on Britain the leverage to browbeat Egypt or the wider Arab world to fall into line.[66]

The Suez Group pointed to the final Article of the 1936 treaty, which stipulated that any new treaty must be negotiated on the basis of the principles of the old. This included Article 7, which gave British forces to right to use Egyptian soil 'in the event of war, imminent menace of war or apprehended international emergency', conditions which existing international conditions easily met.[67] Such views ignored the unlikelihood of an Egyptian government acceding to a new treaty. Ironically, in view of subsequent events, the voice of reason was Eden's. In a Cabinet paper setting out the alternatives, he came down firmly for conditional evacuation.

63 Hankey to Eden, 11 February 1953, TNA, FO 371/102763.

64 Amery, Implications of Evacuation and British Requirements in Egypt, 16 March 1953, TNA, FO 371/102807.

65 Eden to Lord Hankey, 25 February 1953, TNA, FO 371/102763.

66 R. Allen minute, 14 February 1953, TNA, FO 371/102796.

67 Amery memorandum, TNA, FO 371/102763.

Britain had consistently breached the treaty by having well in excess of the normal garrison, and the reality was that it expired in 1956:

> What other course could we follow? … Thus a policy of standing on the Treaty would be shaky in the present and barren in the future. We could undoubtedly deal effectively with any immediate attempt by the Egyptians to eject us from the Canal Zone. But the situation that would create would almost certainly compel us to reoccupy Egypt, with all the consequences this would entail. We should be likely to have world opinion against us and would find it difficult to make a case if Egypt took us to the United Nations. It is hard to see what future there is for such a policy. We cannot afford to keep 80,000 men indefinitely in the Canal Zone … If we leave them there in defiance of the Egyptians they would be wholly absorbed in coping with a situation their very presence creates.[68]

The Treasury objected to losing assets in the Canal Zone valued at £500 million, and was not convinced by Eden's arguments. 'The Foreign Secretary', minuted G.P. Humphrey-Davies, 'contemplates that any arrangement made with Egypt should safeguard the free use of the Canal – rightly, since it is of crucial importance to the sterling area. Once the soldiers have gone this may not be easy to achieve in practice …'.[69]

In the end, a culmination of factors propelled the Churchill government to reopen negotiations with Egypt for an agreement on withdrawal. The adhesion of Greece and Turkey to NATO, combined with the American desire to pursue a Northern Tier strategy with bases closer to the Soviet Union, rendered the Suez base no longer essential to Western defences. By now it was costing around £50 million per annum to sustain British forces in the Canal Zone. Egyptian co-operation, in terms of labour and goodwill, was deemed essential if they were to stay, but it was abundantly plain that neither was likely without a decision to evacuate in short order. 'I am afraid', Eden wrote to a reluctant Churchill, 'the real alternative to an agreement is a fight which we can ill afford and from which we should emerge, though victorious in arms, without a friend left in the Middle East.'[70]

The Churchill government desired a linkage between the defence negotiations and the issue of free navigation. France and the United States were secretly approached in 1952–53 to make a joint approach to Egypt, but this foundered on American reluctance to upset Cairo. Washington was not a signatory of the 1888 convention, did not have the same vested interest in Suez remaining open, and tended to view the Egyptian problem in the wider context of the need to encompass Egypt within a Middle East defence agreement.[71] In August 1953, Lord Salisbury, the Acting Foreign Secretary, warned the Cabinet: 'we may reach a settlement with Egypt on defence issues which would commit us to withdrawing our combatant troops from the Suez Canal Zone without any safeguard whatever for the freedom

68 Eden, Egypt: The Alternatives, 16 February 1953, TNA, CAB 129/59.
69 Minute by G.P. Humphreys-Davies, 16 February 1953, TNA, T225/319.
70 Eden minute to Churchill, 28 December 1953, TNA, FO 371/108413.
71 State Department, 11 March 1953, TNA, FO 371/102898.

of navigation in this international waterway'.[72] On 8 September 1953, the Cabinet, recognizing that Washington did not support an explication of future transit rights lest this affected its position over the Panama Canal, agreed that a reference to free navigation would now suffice.[73] Cairo responded that Britain must reiterate the 1936 Article which recognized that the Canal was an integral part of Egypt.[74]

Washington facilitated final agreement by promising Cairo $40 million of economic aid and dangling the tantalizing prospect of arms supplies.[75] The Suez Canal Base Agreement[76] comprised 13 Articles. Under Article 8, whose draft was agreed on 7 October 1953, the contracting parties recognized that 'the Suez Maritime Canal, which is an integral part of Egypt, is a waterway economically, commercially and strategically of international importance, and express the determination to uphold the Convention guaranteeing the freedom of navigation of the Canal signed at Constantinople on the 29th of October, 1888'.[77] From the British perspective, however, the auguries were not good. The Suez Canal Committee had considered but rejected as impossible to achieve a clause requiring the Egyptians not to interfere with Canal shipping.[78] On 28 September 1954, the *Bat Galim*, an Israeli-flagged ship, had been seized by the Egyptians at the southern end of the Suez Canal, leading Israel to bring the matter before the Security Council the following month.

Overview

Symbolizing British domination over the Suez Canal was Navy House at Port Said, the headquarters of the British Senior Naval Officer. During two world wars Britain clung onto the waterway, but ultimately it was the threat from within, from Egyptian nationalism, which first undermined and then overwhelmed its ascendancy. British supremacy was underpinned by three factors: the presence of their military forces in Egypt and consequent control over native forces; a subservient Egyptian government as the 'unwilling symbiotic partner'[79] whether by persuasion or bullying, and a compliant Canal Company. In 1882, Britain acted in the name of the Khedive to establish its occupation. During the Great War, action was taken in the Canal Zone under the aegis of the Egyptian government. The Canal Company, after Anglo-French relations thawed, generally obliged when the British requested measures

72 Lord Salisbury, Suez Canal: Freedom of Navigation, 7 August 1953, TNA, CAB 129/62.

73 Cabinet meeting, 8 September 1953, TNA, CAB 128/26/2.

74 R.M.A. Hankey (Cairo) to Foreign Office, 23 September 1953, TNA, PREM 11/485.

75 D.F. Calhoun, *Hungary and Suez, 1956: An Exploration of Who Makes History* (New York, 1991), p. 23.

76 See R. Owen, 'The Tragedy of the Anglo-Egyptian Settlement of 1954', in W.R. Louis and R. Owen (eds), *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford, 1991).

77 Text of the final agreement, 19 October 1954, TNA, DEFE 7/1011.

78 T.F. Bird, Ministry of Transport in Suez Canal Committee, 7th meeting, 30 June 1954, TNA, 134/802.

79 J.C. Hurewitz, 'The Historical Background', in Louis and Owen (eds), *Suez 1956*, p. 20.

were taken, given the mutual interest in Canal security. For instance, in 1928, at the request of the Admiralty, it purchased minesweepers.[80] Throughout the inter-war period, British representations succeeded in excluding Britain's potential enemies, Germany, Italy and Japan, from attaining seats on the Board notwithstanding the fact that their share of traffic would normally have entitled them to representation.[81] Again, Britain managed to secure a higher proportion of Canal pilots than other nations on the basis of its greater use of the waterway. These foundations survived until the Second World War, after which they unravelled.

In retrospect, the 1936 treaty and the two conventions between Egypt and the Canal Company were stopgaps rather than enduring solutions because they only partially met Egyptian aspirations. As Farnie perceived: 'The "permanent military defensive alliance" of 1936 was … regarded as only temporary in Egyptian eyes and was bound to suffer erosion because Egypt remained the injured partner in the alliance, haunted by the ineradictable memory of the occupation.'[82] Military evacuation became politically, economically and strategically expedient against the backdrop of the Cold War. Egyptian governments no longer played ball, whilst the Canal Company distanced itself from British proposals to challenge Egyptian interference in the operating of the Canal. 'Despite their own interest in the Canal,' a Treasury official bemoaned in the Suez Canal Committee, established in January 1954 to seek the co-operation of maritime powers in procuring guarantees over the free navigation of Suez, 'they [the Canal Company] are too frightened of becoming involved in our quarrel. They might favour some action by us but when it came to the point we should find ourselves facing the Egyptians alone.'[83] Thus, in 1949 the company refused to allow a British combined operation exercise in the Canal area, whilst in 1951 it declined to accept the help of the Royal Navy in combating Egyptian interference in Canal management. It also came under increasing pressure from Egypt for a larger share in the profits, further seats on the Board and more Egyptian employees, conceding in March 1949 that Egyptian representation among the staff should be increased and that the number of Egyptian directors be raised to five, with an additional two in 1959 and 1964, and the Egyptian share in the profits rise to 7 per cent. These sops were insufficient to satiate the agenda of Colonel Nasser, with his desire for the nationalization of the Canal Company held back only by the British military presence in the Canal Zone.

By 1953–54, Britain was faced with the supreme irony of having to maintain more troops in the Canal Zone because of the Egyptian threat. 'The Egyptians', minuted Roger Allen, head of the African Department, 'have already succeeded to this extent that they have compelled us to realise that the maintenance of a base

80 See correspondence within T206/6.

81 See Foreign Office, Requests by Italian Government for Nomination of an Italian Director, 7 March 1938, TNA, T160/825. In 1937, commercial tonnage passing through Suez was: British Empire 48 per cent, Italy 13.6 per cent, Germany 9.5 per cent, Holland 8 per cent, France 5 per cent and Japan 2.7 per cent.

82 Farnie, *East and West of Suez*, p. 605.

83 D.R. Serpell, Suez Canal Committee, 5th meeting, 23 March 1954, TNA, CAB 134/802.

in a hostile country is not an economic proposition.'[84] In January 1952, Churchill admitted in his Congressional address that it was 'no longer possible' for Britain 'to bear the whole burden of maintaining the freedom of the famous waterway of the Suez Canal'.[85] The Chiefs of Staff did not relish the prospect of giving up the Suez base, but unlike their predecessors, were prepared to concede much to the Egyptians lest failure affected the entire British position in the Middle East.[86]

The Canal Base Agreement left Britain, as the main user of Suez, at the mercy of Egyptian goodwill. It formally ended the 1936 treaty, which had become such a bone of contention. Its conclusion, in August 1936, marked the apogee of British dominance over the Suez Canal, promising another twenty years of ascendancy. But the international situation of the mid-1950s did not equate to the position in the mid-1930s when the League of Nations, following its ignominious defeat in the Italo-Abyssinian crisis, was a spent force, meaning that Britain could safely sponsor Egyptian membership in 1937 without fear of its position in Egypt being seriously challenged. After 1945, the growing number of newly independent nations emerging from collapsed or collapsing empires, together with the emergence of the two anti-imperial superpowers, rendered the old ways redundant. In combination with Britain's decline as a world power, the position in Egypt was no longer tenable. The tables were reversed: the new agreement was not called a treaty because of the odium attached by Egypt to the 1936 accord; the military evacuation would be completed within twenty months, the shortest time possible; civilian contractors left behind were without protection. True, Egypt had renewed its adhesion to the 1888 convention, but it had already taken a leaf out of the British book and exploited its manifest contradictions to interpret clauses to suit its interests. The new agreement, based, unlike in 1936, on an Egyptian rather than a British draft, did not acknowledge the Suez Canal as vital to Britain, but only as an integral part of Egypt. Yet it was no less significant: 60 per cent of Canal traffic was between Britain and the Commonwealth, and it had become a vital artery for conveying oil to Western Europe from the Persian Gulf. As Farnie judged, the agreement 'ended the era in which the Canal had been regarded as a cornerstone of imperial strategy'.[87] Yet, psychologically, Eden, now British Prime Minister, with his imperial mindset, who in 1929 had referred to Suez as 'the swing door of the British Empire',[88] could not accept that Egypt was capable of administering the Canal or running it in the best interests of world shipping. 'Her Majesty's Government', the Soviet Union was informed, 'do not accept Nasser's right to deal with a company of an international character in the way in which he has done, and they have no confidence that he will permit the Canal to be operated in an impartial manner as an international waterway.'[89]

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84 Minute by R. Allen, 30 June 1953, TNA, FO 371/102812.

85 Quoted in S. Morewood, 'Suez: The Canal before the Crisis', *History Today*, 56/11 (November 2006): 45.

86 Chiefs of Staff, Middle East Defence, 9 January 1954, TNA, CAB 129/65.

87 Farnie, *East and West of Suez*, p. 710.

88 Quoted in K. Kyle, *Suez* (London, 1991), p. 7.

89 Foreign Office to British Embassy in Moscow, 1 August 1956, TNA, FO 371/119079. Ironically, Britain had insisted that the Canal Company was Egyptian to fend off any

At the time, Nasser spoke encouragingly of the dawn of 'a new era of co-operation and mutual understanding'. His creation of a Suez Canal Committee the same month as the agreement was concluded commenced the planning that would lead to 26 July 1956, the start of the Suez crisis. 'Britain', Nasser declared in his Alexandria speech:

> is not to interfere in our affairs. She nationalised iron, steel, transport and maritime transport. Nobody asked her why she is nationalising them. She is free regarding her joint-stock companies and we are free regarding our joint stock companies, to nationalise what we want, to nationalise and leave alone what we want to leave alone. England has nothing to do with us and England is causing a clamour. Does she believe that we are part of the British Crown or that we belong to British imperialists? Egypt today is a free and independent state. She will guard her independence and will guard her freedom.[90]

The charismatic Egyptian leader was determined to achieve true independence for his country, which meant gaining and keeping control of the famous waterway built by Egyptian labour once the last British troops left the Canal Zone, which they did on 13 June 1956. After nationalization, against a backdrop of over seventy years of subservience to the British, Nasser remained resolute in parrying any diplomatic solutions which smacked of colonialism. Throughout the summer, the Egyptians rejected all attempts to form an international administration, leading Britain and France, in collusion with Israel, to seek a military solution. In the process, the British nightmare of a Canal blocked for months[91] finally came to pass with the Egyptians sinking ships (ironically, largely owned by the Canal Company) in retaliation for the Anglo-French invasion.

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moves to exert international control, thereby unwittingly creating the legal justification for nationalization.

90 Quoted in Sir Humphrey Trevelyan (Cairo) to Foreign Office, 28 July 1956, TNA, FO 371/119079.

91 The Canal remained blocked until March 1957.

Chapter 2

Eden, Churchill and the Battle of the Canal Zone, 1951–1954

Michael T. Thornhill

Introduction

Winston Churchill is the forgotten man of Suez. Having resigned as Conservative Prime Minister in April 1955, he is regarded as something of a footnote to the events of 1956, while his successor, Anthony Eden, continues to dominate accounts of the crisis. And yet Churchill's long shadow was to have an immense influence on Eden's behaviour in 1956, not least because of an earlier Suez campaign, albeit one which has, until recently, been both officially and historically interpreted as essentially a political quarrel relating to 'defence negotiations' over the future of Britain's Canal Zone base. It is the contention of this chapter, in contrast, that the dispute between Britain and Egypt from October 1951 to July 1954 was as much a military battle involving a nationalist guerrilla struggle and a concomitant counter-insurgency campaign, as the political quarrel which has largely shaped the historiography.[1] Moreover, by comprehending the real nature of the Canal Zone struggle, and the roles played therein by Churchill and Eden, it is possible to gain new insights into Eden's behaviour in 1956. If the conventional approach to 'Suez 1956' has been to view the crisis in relation to the legacy of the late 1930s appeasement debates, the approach here is to filter this perspective through a revisionist understanding of the early 1950s Canal Zone dispute.

1 Works which emphasize the political angles include: Ritchie Ovendale, 'Egypt and the Suez Base Agreement', in John Young (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration* (Leicester, 1988); Wm. Roger Louis, 'The Tragedy of the Anglo-Egyptian Settlement of 1954', in Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds), *Suez 1956* (Oxford, 1989); John Kent, 'The Egyptian Base and the Defence of the Middle East, 1945–54', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 21/3 (1993); Wm. Roger Louis, 'Churchill and Egypt 1946–1956', in Robert Blake and Wm. Roger Louis (eds), *Churchill* (Oxford, 1993); Michael J. Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East* (London, 1997), and John Kent (ed.), *Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East*, British Documents on the End of Empire Series B, vol. 4 (London, 1998). The most important of these in relation to the themes of this chapter are the two by Louis. By way of contrast, the present author's *Road to Suez: The Battle of the Canal Zone* (Stroud, 2006) is the first study to treat the struggle as one of Britain's post-war counter-insurgency campaigns in the empire. This approach, via the author's consultancy role, also informed the first episode of BBC2's three-part documentary series *A Very British Crisis*, which was broadcast on the fiftieth anniversary of Suez.

To understand why the orthodox focus on the crisis of 1951 to 1954 has been somewhat awry, it is instructive to return to the worst period of the crisis – January 1952. During this month, Churchill attempted to give the struggle a resounding name, doing so while on a visit to Washington in a bid to enlist US military support for Britain's Suez bastion. The sobriquet he came up with was the Battle of Canal Zone, but it was never allowed to catch on. In the first instance, the Truman administration was loath to be dragged into what it regarded as 'the Egyptian mess', and so the requests for assistance fell on deaf ears.[2] More to the point, repeated references to a full-scale battle or insurgency would have been embarrassing for Britain both internationally and domestically, given the political delicacy of its position in Egypt. Rather than being part of the 'formal' empire of direct rule, Egypt was the cornerstone of Britain's 'informal' sphere of indirect influence in which a bilateral defence treaty, signed in 1936, accorded rights to station up to 10,000 British troops on Egyptian soil. But while this legal arrangement allowed London to denounce the attacks against the Suez base as terrorism, Britain's case was always muddied by the size of its troop presence in Egypt. For much of the 1951–54 crisis, 80,000 were deployed. British policymakers were thus guilty of clinging to one legal point while obtusely ignoring another.

Another reason why January 1952 is significant in terms of the hidden history of the Canal Zone dispute is because this was when Britain's most senior military officer in the Middle East, General Sir Brian Robertson, first requested a campaign medal for the soldiers and airmen in Egypt. A week later, on 25 January, British troops, backed by armour, fought a five-hour battle against 1000 Egyptian auxiliary policemen in their barracks in the Canal Zone town of Ismailia. Fifty Egyptians were killed, and over 800 captured. Anti-Western rioting in Cairo the next day resulted in the dismissal of Egypt's government. This brought to an end the most dangerous phase of the crisis (although there were periods in 1953 and 1954 which were nearly as intense), with the effect of taking the wind out of Robertson's medal request. Moreover, given the ongoing attempts to reach a negotiated settlement, issuing a campaign medal throughout this period would have been politically counter-productive. The subsequent embarrassment of the Suez war was a further incentive to forget the whole affair. Only in 2003, following extensive lobbying by ex-servicemen, was the so-called 'forgotten campaign' of 1951–54 finally remembered by a British government via the belated awarding of a general service medal with a Canal Zone clasp.[3] The unequivocal *official* implication was that the Egyptian situation had been comparable to the colonial emergencies which had occurred in the directly administered parts of the empire.

To be sure, in accounts of the 1956 crisis, Eden's earlier settlement of the base dispute is often taken as one of the first milestones on the road to Suez, the proximity

2 TNA, PREM 11/632 140, Brook to Churchill, 8 January 1952; NARA, RG59 974.5301/1-2352 Raynor to Perkins, 21 January 1952; NARA, RG59 974.5301/1-2352 Deputy Secretary of Defence to Acheson, 23 January 1952.

3 See Cm 5999, Cabinet Office, *The Naval General Service Medal and General Service Medal (Army and Royal Air Force): Service in the Suez Canal Zone between 16 October 1951 and 19 October 1954* (London, 2003).

between the last British troops pulling out of Egypt in June, as per the 1954 agreement, and about a thousand hours later Nasser nationalizing the Suez Canal Company naturally proving irresistible. Nevertheless, the guerrilla struggle which produced this withdrawal tends to be barely touched upon, even by Eden's numerous biographers (whose primary remit, after all, has typically been to contextualize their subject's *Götterdämmerung*). The aforementioned Ismailia incident usually gets a brief mention, as does the nationalist rioting in Cairo the next day, during which 25 Westerners were murdered. But the steady drip of casualties throughout the 1951–54 crisis has passed largely unacknowledged, let alone properly charted and explained. This situation, it must be stated, has rather uncritically reflected the attitudes of British ministers and civil servants at the time, in that they had a deliberate policy of minimizing discussion of Canal Zone incidents in Parliament.[4]

Despite neglecting the insurgency aspects of the base dispute, much is made in Suez historiography of the uses of history, and more particularly, the 'lessons of Munich' – the memory of appeasement being so much to the fore in 1950s political life. Eden, of course, made this the central theme of his three volumes of memoirs, a point he underscored with the title of the first volume published, *Full Circle* (1960), which dealt with his last phase in high office from 1951 to 1957. But the appeasement connection has not worked in Eden's favour. Instead of being remembered, in Churchill's words of 1948, as the 'one strong young figure standing up against long, dismal, drawling tides of drift and surrender', Eden's status as a standard-bearer of 1930s anti-appeasement has been replaced with the view that he was more concerned with Mussolini than Hitler, and that he resigned from the Chamberlain government over a trivial matter, and not because of some lordly cause.[5] It is thus now commonplace to view Eden's anti-appeasement rhetoric in 1956 as emanating from decidedly complicated wellsprings. This becomes all the more evident – and indeed potent – when his handling of the earlier Canal Zone dispute is also factored into the equation.

Churchill, moreover, was absolutely central to this appeasement complex. In the first instance, it is important to note that Eden in the late 1930s was less his protégé, as popularly recalled because of their relationship during the Second World War, than a political rival; and secondly, despite his subsequent praise of Eden, Churchill never seems to have forgotten the gap between Eden's reputation over appeasement and the reality. Indeed, during the Canal Zone dispute and the related difficulties in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Condominium, Churchill repeatedly made references to Eden's attempts to negotiate with Egypt as being appeasement. On one occasion, he raged that 'he never knew before that Munich was situated on the Nile'.[6] Given that Conservative politics since 1940 had been dominated by the anti-Munichite wing of the party, and that having a reputation for being pro-appeasement was a major stain on a career (Rab Butler being the prominent example in this respect), such criticisms by Churchill had serious implications. Eden was then widely regarded

4 See TNA, FO 371/108450 JE1193/111, minute by Bromley, 14 April 1954.

5 David Carlton's *Anthony Eden*, first published in 1981, is influential in this regard. The Churchill quote is from p. 136 of the 1986 London paperback edition.

6 Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: Diaries 1951–55* (London, 1986), p. 75.

as his heir apparent to the premiership. The tension this created, not least because Churchill clung on to power longer than anyone expected, proved to be not only immense, but also debilitating.

The Insurgency Begins

Britain's relations with Egypt entered a far more dangerous era on 15 October 1951, the date when the Egyptian parliament abrogated the defence treaty of 1936. Although it was coupled with familiar demands for an immediate evacuation of all British forces from the Canal Zone, it soon became clear that the long-standing nationalist challenge to the 'occupation' had developed a completely new manifestation. From this point on, guerrilla units – inspired by fedayeen activities in the Palestine War of 1948 – began mounting concerted attacks on Britain's Suez garrison. These irregular units called themselves liberation battalions and saw their battle as the Liberation Struggle, a name which almost certainly helped inspire Churchill's own Battle of the Canal Zone. In any case, the era of street demonstrations and other staged spectacles in the nationalist struggle was over: an armed fight was now on, even if it was still too asymmetrical to comprise a frontal assault between rival armies.

Less than a fortnight later, on 25 October 1951, the Conservatives won a general election in Britain with a Commons majority of 17. The legacy of the outgoing Attlee government, which the incoming Churchill administration with Eden as Foreign Secretary adhered to, was to establish a policy aimed at toppling Egypt's Wafd government.[7] To this end, intermittent oil sanctions – including white oils used for cooking – were applied against the population in the Nile Delta as a means of causing economic disruption and political pressure.[8] In addition, MI6 (which had a large presence at the British embassy in Cairo) secretly contacted Egypt's opposition parties and King Farouk's palace in order to try to establish the likely price of an alternative government.[9]

Meanwhile, the Wafd, on the day after the abrogation law was passed, initiated its own tried and tested response in the national struggle – it staged a riot. (The familiar practice was to bribe rabble-rousers, while at the same time covertly involving the security forces.) The location was Ismailia, the administrative centre of the Suez Canal Company, as well as the headquarters for British troops in Egypt. But whereas in the past such demonstrations had symbolized and contained nationalist resistance, by October 1951 this theatre of public disorder was no longer enough. Instead, during the months that followed, the towns in the Canal Zone, with their sizeable Egyptian populations, became home to liberation battalions which took their orders not from the Wafd (although the government vainly attempted to regulate their activities), but from the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist organizations. The guerrilla

7 TNA, FO 371/90146 JE1951/428, minute by Bowker, 27 October 1951; TNA, PREM 11/92 111–12, Foreign Office to Stevenson, 2 November 1951.

8 TNA, FO 141/1440 1041/2/201/51G, COS to Robertson, 2 November 1951.

9 TNA, FO 141/1440 1041/2/253/51G, minute by Creswell, 6 November 1951; TNA, FO 141/1451 10121/22/51G, minute by Creswell, 20 November 1951, and author's interview with Frank Brenchley, Oxford, 1997.

tactics deployed included daily sabotage and sniping attacks, and were supplemented with increasing frequency by the gruesome killing of British servicemen. Their mutilated bodies were often dumped in the Sweet Water Canal which ran through the base area. The British forces responded in an increasingly proactive way. Passive guard duties were bolstered by highly mobile foot patrols aimed at intercepting the fedayeen before they reached their targets. By mid-January 1952 (three months into the crisis), 30 British servicemen had been killed and 69 wounded. Reliable figures for the Egyptian side are not known.[10]

Meanwhile, Churchill's first response to the Canal Zone struggle was to prove uncharacteristically moderate. Do not do anything that was either 'sharp or sudden', he advised Eden on 28 October 1951, two days after taking office.[11] This early caution was probably a fleeting legacy of the election campaign, on the last day of which the *Daily Mirror* had devoted its entire front page to the question, 'Whose finger do you want on the trigger?' In any case, by early December it was long forgotten. When a heavy-handed counter-insurgency action entailing the bulldozing of over a hundred buildings in the Suez suburb of Kafr Abdu (it was codenamed Operation Flatten) caused an international furore, Churchill responded by sending a personal telegram to the British commander congratulating him on the measures.[12] Eden, on the other hand, only publicly supported what amounted to the levelling of a small village out of necessity, having been told about the operation at a very late stage.[13]

Yet this is not to suggest that Eden lacked resolve in the crisis; far from it. Indeed, on 19 January, when a bomb hidden in an Ismailia fruit seller's barrow of oranges killed two more British soldiers and injured six others (raising the casualty figures to 32 dead and 75 wounded), Eden responded in the strongest possible way: he set in motion plans to disarm Ismailia's 1000-strong auxiliary police force. Back in December 1951, the British Ambassador in Egypt, Sir Ralph Stevenson, had signalled the possible need to carry out this task (the auxiliaries were known to be moonlighting as fedayeen), but had also warned that such measures could 'hardly fail to bring the situation to a head'.[14] Tellingly, on 24 January Eden chaired a special meeting of the Chiefs of Staff to discuss the circumstances in which the large-scale military operations to rescue British and foreign nationals from Cairo and Alexandria (Rodeo Bernard and Rodeo Flail respectively) would be launched, should the imminent disarming of Ismailia's police prompt a widespread breakdown of order across the Nile Delta.[15] Clearly, no one was under any illusions that a major confrontation was about to take place. Meanwhile, Churchill, who was sailing back from the aforementioned official visit to the United States (Eden had flown back), was kept apprised of the discussions and fully concurred with Eden's proposed measures.[16]

10 Thornhill, *Road to Suez*, pp. 54–5.

11 TNA, FO 371/90200 JE1261/311, Churchill to Eden, 28 October 1951.

12 Gregory Blaxland, *Objective Egypt* (London, 1966), p. 166

13 TNA, FO 141/1440 1041/2/386/51G, Allen to Creswell, 15 December 1951.

14 TNA, FO 371/90110 210, Stevenson to Foreign Office, 20 December 1951.

15 TNA, PREM 11/632 130–32, COS meeting, 24 January 1952.

16 TNA, PREM 11/91 244, Eden to Churchill, 25 January 1952.

The British action to disarm Ismailia's auxiliary police, which was codenamed Operation Eagle, began before first light on Friday 25 January 1952 and entailed whole sections of the town being sealed off. The temporary lodgings of the police (formerly hospital buildings) were surrounded by Bren gun carriers and accompanying infantry sections, along with a Centurion tank. Although requests were made for the police to surrender, these were ignored and instead the Egyptians used the parleying to occupy already fortified positions on the roofs of the buildings and in the yard below. The upshot was a five-hour pitched battle, the ferocity of which killed four British soldiers, as well as the 50 police auxiliaries already mentioned. This Egyptian bravery was to have a profound influence on Britain's military commanders, and is fundamental in explaining why a cumbersome task force of 80,000 troops – the same strength as the Canal Zone garrison between much of 1951 and 1954 – was allotted to the Suez invasion of 1956.

Egypt's Crisis of Governability

The next day, Cairo experienced some of its worst ever rioting with the Europeanized districts of the city being targeted for looting and arson attacks. Over 700 buildings were destroyed; 9 Britons were killed amongst 26 Westerners in total. The absence of order on what became known as Black Saturday resulted in Farouk dismissing the Wafd government, albeit only after British forces had readied themselves for intervention. It could be argued, therefore, that Britain had achieved its main aim, the ousting of the Wafd, but if so, it was a decidedly pyrrhic victory. Egypt's constitutional system, which had been moulded by Britain in the wake of the First World War to suit its own imperial interests (a politically powerful, conservative monarchy was pitted against a nationalist-dominated parliamentary structure), was visibly collapsing. The influence of fedayeen in recent months indicated that it was not just the 'defence' relationship with Britain which had been abrogated – the Egyptian state's prerogative over the coercive instruments of power had also effectively been conceded. Consequently, the truce in the Canal Zone which occurred after Black Saturday was only likely to last for as long as the public mood remained subdued. In the mean time, the formation and training of the liberation battalions were not privileges for the political elite to take back; they had become a national right, one which saw the empowerment of the masses via the guerrilla activities of a few. Rather than being dismantled after 26 January, the liberation battalions were temporarily confined to university campuses, away from the Canal Zone.[17]

While Eden and Churchill agreed with one another over the Ismailia action, thereafter they rarely saw eye-to-eye again on Egyptian matters, a situation that lasted throughout the remainder of the Canal Zone dispute. The initial reason for this major rift in the Conservative government was Eden's desire to initiate negotiations over the future of the Suez base while Egypt was supposedly in a chastened mood after Black Saturday.[18] Churchill, on the other hand, was instinctively opposed to

17 Ahmed Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt* (London, 1985), p. 79; Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (London, 1969), pp. 94–5.

18 TNA, PREM 11/91 187-8, Eden to Stevenson, 28 January 1952.

negotiations *at any time*. For him, the Suez base was a defining symbol of Britain's world power status which should not be negotiated away. Instead of immediately asserting this, however, he initially argued that Egypt was not a fit country to negotiate with after the Cairo riots. 'The horrible behaviour of the mob puts them lower than the most degraded savages now known', he wrote to Eden on 30 January: 'Unless the Egyptian government can purge themselves by the condign punishment of the offenders and by the most abject and complete regrets and reparations I doubt whether any relationship is possible with them.'[19] A succession of weak, palace-appointed governments over the next six months – another indication of Egypt's crisis of governability – gave credence to Churchill's complementary argument that there was, in any case, no one suitable in Egyptian affairs to deal with.[20] Eden nevertheless still favoured a conciliatory policy. Although his immediate motivation may have been the heightened nationalist challenge in Egypt, the underlying influences related to the changed – and changing – international system after the Second World War, and Britain's reduced capabilities within that system. On 10 March 1952, he told Churchill, 'The plain fact is that we are no longer in a position to impose our will upon Egypt, regardless of the cost in men, money and international goodwill both throughout the Middle East and the rest of the world. If I cannot impose my will, I must negotiate.'[21]

A brief respite in the Churchill–Eden tensions occurred in the wake of the Free Officers' seizure of power between 23 and 26 July. The distinct possibility that Britain had foreknowledge of the planned insurrection and some degree of complicity with the mutineers (even if the exact timing of the coup caught everyone by surprise) may well explain both of their initial positive reactions to this turn of events, despite the alarmist telegrams emanating from the British chargé in Alexandria.[22] Eden clearly hoped that Egypt would at last have a government that was strong and clean enough to push through a more equal – and therefore acceptable – Canal Zone treaty. The apparent leader of the coup, General Mohammed Neguib (in fact, a figurehead), seemed reasonable enough, even if little was known about the younger officers who always shadowed him, one of whom was a rather intense 34-year-old called Gamal Abdel Nasser. Meanwhile, the liberal-imperialist in Churchill applauded the new regime's early focus on land reform. In a letter to Eden dated 26 August (exactly a month after Farouk was ousted), the Prime Minister wrote: 'It is most important that we should not appear to be defending the landlords and pashas against long overdue reforms for the fellaheen.' 'There might well be a policy', he concluded, 'in which the US would join, of making a success of Neguib.'[23]

But the Americans were well in advance of Churchill in this regard, and were instead keen to keep the British at arm's length, lest they spoil their own privileged access to the coup leaders. Indeed, a new element in the Battle of the Canal Zone took shape in the months after the July coup, namely an ill-disguised

19 TNA, FO 800/768 Eg/52/15, Churchill to Eden, 30 January 1952.
20 TNA, FO 371/96985 JE1202/1G, Churchill to Eden, 9 March 1952.
21 TNA, FO 371/96985 JE1202/2, Eden to Churchill, 10 March 1952.
22 Thornhill, *Road to Suez*, pp. 78–94.
23 TNA, FO 800/769 ME/52/64, Churchill to Eden, 26 August 1952.

Anglo-American contest for influence in Egypt's internal affairs. The upshot, perhaps inevitably, was a new layer of friction between Churchill and Eden. While the latter wanted to harness the US's close relations with the junta for the purposes of settling the base dispute, Churchill, mindful that the Americans would press the British for concessions, favoured a more independent approach. He encapsulated this on one occasion by insisting that it was 'undignified' to be 'always running to the Americans for help'.[24] Again, it can be argued that Eden, the realist, was looking to work with the changed circumstances of the post-war international order, while Churchill, the romantic reactionary, wanted to turn back the clock to an age when Britain did not always need America's help and approval. Churchill's influence in this regard was certainly evident in 1956.

The Sudan and the Canal Zone Insurgency

The rapprochement between Cairo and London following the July coup ended in the winter of 1952–53, a casualty of the reintroduction of the Sudan complication in Anglo-Egyptian affairs. The relationship between Churchill and Eden deteriorated still further, and indeed came very close to breaking point (ironically so, given that Eden was now part of Churchill's family, having married his niece, Clarissa, in August 1952). Their differences over Sudanese policy had a familiar polarized ring to them. Whereas Eden was prepared to allow Egypt to have a say about the Sudan's future constitutional reform process provided that Cairo first accepted the principle of Sudanese self-determination, Churchill took a completely different line. With his interest in the topic more attuned to memories of his own involvement in the Battle of Omdurman in 1898 (the subject of his book *The River War*, published a year later), he firmly believed that if hanging on to the Suez bastion was a test case of empire, then maintaining the British position in the Sudan was, in turn, the test case of Britain's policy towards Egypt. 'What happens here', he told Eden on 15 January 1953, 'will set the pace for us all over Africa and the Middle East.'[25] The answer to both problems, he felt, was to be found in deeds not words, a phrase that became his mantra and which routinely equated to advocating some form of military intervention.

On 30 January, just as the Sudan dispute was at its height and Egypt was putting pressure on Britain via guerrilla incidents in the Canal Zone (the military regime was far better at regulating these activities than the Wafd had been), Churchill attended a cabinet sub-committee which Eden had established to deal with the Sudan crisis. The minutes – as was their style – greyly recorded that the Prime Minister pressed the case for 'greater firmness' in the negotiations with Egypt, and that the present Sudan talks should be broken off if Neguib refused to accept Britain's position.[26] However, the talk amongst Churchill and Eden's staff was probably more illustrative of how views were actually aired amongst ministers. 'I spent a very uncomfortable half-hour with the Private Secretaries at No. 10,' noted Eden's own private secretary, Evelyn Shuckburgh, during which 'they thought we should sit on the gippies and have a

24 TNA, FO 371/102765 JE1052/121G, minute by Hankey, 22 May 1953.

25 TNA, FO 371/102761 JE1052/16G, Churchill to Eden, 15 January 1953.

26 TNA, CAB 130/83 Gen 421 2, 30 January 1953.

"whiff of grapeshot". If it meant letting the British communities in Alexandria and Cairo be massacred that could not be helped.'[27] The prospect of a break in the Sudan negotiations was expected to lead to rioting in Khartoum, so raising the prospect of Britain having to send in reinforcements from Egypt. This, in turn, was likely to stir up further trouble in the Canal Zone, or worse still, in Cairo or Alexandria. Britain's Chief of Imperial General Staff fretted that such an eventuality might lead to the implementation of the dreaded Rodeo operations, which though devised as rescue operations for Western civilians in Cairo and Alexandria, nevertheless gave the impression that the real goal was the British re-occupation of the Nile Delta.[28]

Churchill, however, was well versed in the caution of military commanders, and therefore tried to manipulate these apprehensions for his own ends. Thus, on 11 February, he outlined to the Cabinet's defence committee a scheme to replace the Rodeo operations with a plan for rounding up and disarming that part of the Egyptian army located in the Sinai Peninsula. These forces, he argued, could then serve as a bargaining chip in future negotiations.[29] One can only ponder the incredulous looks around the table. Later that day, Churchill tried to raise the spectre of a backbench revolt (which he was tacitly encouraging), but the balance of opinion in the Cabinet resided with Eden's conciliatory approach. With realistic military considerations dictating compromise, not to mention the attitude of the Sudanese themselves, it was difficult to see what else could be done. Still, the impression of 'appeasement' lingered. All the key decisions taken in Cabinet in January and February 1953 came at a time of intense guerrilla activity in the Canal Zone. Eden later wrote that he would have resigned had his party not approved the policy of securing a new Anglo-Egyptian Sudan agreement (which was signed on 12 February 1953).[30]

Eden Ill, Churchill in Complete Control

Eden was subsequently anxious to use the momentum of the Sudan agreement also to settle the Canal Zone dispute, but his hopes were dashed by Anglo-American disunity and his own health problems before they could even attempt to surmount the final hurdle of Churchill's instinctive opposition to a withdrawal. Nevertheless, Eden's views on why an evacuation agreement was necessary are worth quoting, as they show him to be a strong-willed realist, rather than a faint-hearted appeaser. 'In the second half of the 20th century,' he wrote in a paper circulated to Cabinet five days after the Sudan agreement, 'we cannot hope to maintain our position in the Middle East by the methods of the last century. However little we like it, we must face that fact.' He concluded:

> We could undoubtedly deal effectively with any immediate attempt by the Egyptians to eject us by force from the Canal Zone. But the situation which this would create would almost certainly compel us to re-occupy Egypt, with all the consequences this would

27 Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, pp. 75–6.
28 TNA, DEFE 4/59 COS (53) 4, 13 January 1953.
29 TNA, CAB 131/13 D (53) 2, 11 February 1953.
30 Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (London, 1960), p. 247.

> entail. We should be likely to have world opinion against us and would find it difficult to make a case if Egypt took us to the United Nations. It is hard to see what future there is for such a policy. We cannot afford to keep 80,000 men indefinitely in the Canal Zone.[31]

In April, Eden underwent surgery which went seriously wrong, obliging him to convalesce for five months. Churchill consequently assumed control of the Foreign Office and made the Canal Zone dispute a priority, albeit in way diametrically opposed to Eden's approach. Churchill began his tenure by insisting that all telegrams on Egyptian matters be sent to his private office.[32] The Foreign Office was also instructed to stop complaining to the military regime about inflammatory Egyptian statements. 'The more abusive and insulting they are,' he stated on 22 April, 'the easier it will be for us to take a calm line and also, if need be, a strong one.'[33] The previous day, he had requested to see the plans for the defence of the British embassy in Cairo in the event of a mob attack.[34] His interest in such matters was not academic.

The late spring of 1953 witnessed one of the most dangerous periods of the Canal Zone insurgency, brought on by the announcement that the new US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, would visit Cairo on 11 May as part of a fact-finding tour of the Middle East. Egypt's military regime upped the number of guerrilla attacks against the Suez garrison accordingly, the aim being to bring the dispute to a head in the hope that Dulles would step in and act as mediator. British diplomats also suspected that the intention was to incite the Canal Zone forces into some heavy-handed action akin to the Kafr Abdu and Ismailia incidents.[35] Not surprisingly, Churchill relished the war of nerves this visit produced. In response to the Egyptian junta's dispatch of 4000 auxiliary police to the Canal Zone during the weekend prior to Dulles's arrival, he wired Stevenson the text of a warning to be delivered to the Egyptians in the event of a major clash. It read:

> An organised attack made on members of HM forces by Egyptians who are or have been members of the Egyptian armed forces, or by persons known to be trained or armed by the Egyptian forces would be regarded by HMG as tantamount to an act of war. British forces would therefore be obliged to use all necessary means in their own defence. Anyone found bearing arms and not in uniform would be liable to penalties in accordance with the customs of war.[36]

On the actual day of Dulles's visit, the Foreign Office notified the Cairo embassy that the families of its staff could return to Britain at public expense; advice was also to be given to the wider British community to leave forthwith unless they had some pressing reason to stay. This was done on 19 May.[37]

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31 TNA, CAB 129/59 CP (53) 65, 16 February 1953.

32 TNA, FO 800/772 Eg/53/96, Churchill to Strang, 20 April 1953.

33 TNA, PREM 11/392 119, Churchill to Creswell, 22 April 1953.

34 TNA, CAB 131/13D (53) 25, 21 April 1953.

35 TNA, PREM 11/392, Stevenson to Foreign Office, 7 May 1953.

36 TNA, FO 371/102847 JE11914/22, Churchill to Stevenson, 10 May 1953.

37 TNA, FO 800/773 Eg/53/120, Foreign Office to Stevenson, 11 May 1953; reported in NARA, RG59 774.00 (W) / 5-2153, Caffery to State Department, 22 May 1953.

Churchill's appetite for a fight was further underlined that month by the highly secret decision to authorize the recruitment of senior level civil affairs officers in readiness for Britain severing the Canal Zone from the rest of Egypt. Around 160,000 Egyptians (out of a population of 400,000) were expected to stay put and thus require feeding. Stockpiling of foodstuffs was therefore initiated.[38] Thus, under Churchill's supervision, active arrangements were under way for the imposition of British military government in a sizeable and strategically crucial part of Egypt. Moreover, it was indicative of Churchill's resolve (or recklessness) that a commando brigade from Malta – 'teeth' fighting troops – was redeployed to further strengthen the Suez garrison.[39] Meanwhile, ministers in the Conservative government could not help but notice that details about the Egyptian situation – hitherto a staple feature at twice weekly Cabinet meetings – were in short order since Churchill's assumption of control over the Foreign Office. Harold Macmillan, then a rising star in the government because of his achievements as housing minister, recorded in his diary on 12 May how the Prime Minister was 'taking big risks' in foreign affairs: 'His Egyptian policy (about which the Cabinet has had very little recent information) is a gamble of provoking a situation which leads to the collapse of Neguib's regime … All this reverses altogether Eden's policy.'[40]

When Britain's ambassador in Egypt was also required to take sick leave, Churchill handpicked his temporary replacement, Robin Hankey, because of his robust outlook.[41] As the son of Lord Maurice Hankey, a former secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence and current Board member of the Suez Canal Company, the impression created by the appointment in Egypt was that Britain had sent in a 'hard man' in order to engineer a complete rupture in relations.[42] The truth of the situation was not so far off, as shown by Churchill's personal instructions to Hankey before he departed. Over the course of a dinner in late May, the Prime Minister outlined his Egyptian thinking. His basic line was that Britain did not need a Canal Zone agreement nearly as much as Neguib did: 'If H.M. Embassy did nothing for 6 months except avoid giving things away, he would be very content.' At one point, Hankey was told that he should be a 'patient, sulky pig'. Churchill's attitude to physical trouble was highly illuminating:

> Although we should not of course say so, he would in some ways welcome it. It would do the Egyptians no sort of good. We should certainly not take the initiative in precipitating trouble, but we should know how to deal with it … There might be a nasty situation in Cairo. Obviously if the Egyptian army tried to occupy our Embassy, we should resist. If the crowd attacked our Embassy, we should show patience and not fire unless we must; but in the last resort we must defend it against the mob, conscious that Neguib and the

38 TNA, CAB 131/13 D (53) 9, 13 May 1953; TNA, FO 371/102765 JE1052/117G, minute by Allen, 13 May 1953.

39 Ibid.

40 Peter Catterall (ed.), *The Macmillan Diaries: The Cabinet Years 1950–1957* (London, 2004), p. 231.

41 Louis, 'Churchill and Egypt 1946–1956', p. 479.

42 TNA, PREM 11/629 92-3 Hankey to Foreign Office, 19 June 1953.

> Army must restore order. If relations were broken, the Embassy should go to Fayid, and not leave Egypt if it could be avoided.[43]

It transpired, however, that the Churchill–Hankey channel barely had chance to start functioning before Churchill himself suffered a serious health problem (a stroke on 23 June), the upshot of which was that Lord Salisbury, Eden's old ally from the national governments of the 1930s, assumed control of the Foreign Office, and thus Egyptian policy.

Although Churchill recovered within a matter of weeks, the psychological shock of the stroke seems to have affected his priorities. One of his key recent preoccupations had been with trying to bring about a thaw in the Cold War, especially after Stalin had died in March 1953. This now became an obsession, a personal mission for the sole surviving member of the wartime Big Three. His attitude on the Egyptian question shifted as a consequence, at least for a while. When, in mid-July, British forces sealed off the Canal Zone (a major operation codenamed Diameter) in the search for a missing serviceman, Churchill uncharacteristically described the measures as 'a case of using a steam hammer to crack a nut'.[44] Shuckburgh noted the change in attitude in his diary entry of 3 August: 'the old man … has come round to thinking that we must have an agreement to evacuate the Canal Zone and seems to have dropped his previous idea that we could not possibly go until a lot of people have been killed'.[45]

Eden's Return

Returning to the Foreign Office on 5 October, Eden hoped to capitalize on Churchill's new outlook and use him to win over the Conservative backbench opponents of an evacuation agreement (who were known as the Suez Group). Churchill consequently attended a meeting of the Conservative Party's Foreign Affairs Committee on 21 October and sat next to Lord Alexander of Tunis, the Defence Minister, while he bluntly stated that the Suez base was costing £50 million a year and that it was a 'dead corpse' without Egyptian co-operation. But instead of signalling support for an evacuation agreement, the Prime Minister sat glum-faced throughout. The next day, no doubt encouraged by this spectacle, 26 Conservative MPs, the core of the Suez Group, wrote to Churchill opposing an evacuation from the Canal Zone.[46] Their fears proved premature, however, as the latest phase of negotiations had just broken down over whether the British technicians who were to maintain the base after an evacuation agreement (ready for its reactivation in the event of a future war)

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43 TNA, FO 371/102765 JE1052/121G, minute by Hankey, 22 May 1953.

44 TNA, FO 371/102850 JE119414/87, Churchill to Lloyd, 15 July 1953.

45 Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 95.

46 Bodleian Library, Oxford: Conservative Party Archives, CRD 2/34/1, Foreign Affairs Committee Minutes 1946–55, meeting on 21 October 1953. For a reference to Churchill's demeanour at this meeting, see the next session's minutes at CRD 2/34/1, meeting on 16 December 1953. The Suez Group letter is at TNA, FO 371/102821 JE1192/600, Waterhouse et al. to Churchill, 22 October 1953.

should wear military uniform. The Egyptian regime said categorically no (it was a question of political survival that all foreign troops had to be seen to leave), while Britain stuck to Churchill's formula that: 'Within the Base installations and in transit between them British personnel will be entitled to wear the uniform of the Service to which they belong and to carry a weapon for their personal protection.'[47] The Prime Minister was alive to the symbolic importance of even a few hundred soldier-technicians: an attack on military personnel would constitute an attack on Britain's state interests, which could trigger an appropriate response.

The collapse in the negotiations resulted in an upsurge in guerrilla incidents in the Canal Zone, prompting Churchill to revert to form on Egyptian matters. According to Shuckburgh, the Prime Minister was once again 'longing for a break'. 'It has been my constant fear', he was reported as saying on 12 December 1953, 'that the Egyptians might accept … If they attack us, that would be war, and you can do a lot of things then.'[48] A day earlier, following news of disappointing election results in the Sudan (the pro-Egyptian National Unionist Party became the largest party), Churchill had outlined to Eden a scheme for turning this latest setback into an 'opportunity':

> The exit from all your troubles about Egypt, the Suez Canal, the Sudan, the Southern Sudan and later on in the Middle East will be found in deeds not words, in action not treaties … Let me tell you the action, which, although apparently local, I believe would be comprehensive and decisive. Find some reason to send 2 Battalions of infantry and 3 or 4 squadrons RAF [*sic*] by air to Khartoum. The Governor could perhaps claim that public order required it … Once this sign of strength and action of policy and design had been shown all the Conservative troubles here would be quenched. The negotiations with Egypt will of course be broken off or lapse, but the evacuation would be declared and would begin none the less, and the redeployment of our troops to the extent of the armoured Division or 4 Brigades in the Middle East and Cyprus could begin and proceed as fast as convenient.[49]

While Eden had yet to acquire the appetite for engineering a short colonial war (he instructed his officials to kill the idea[50]), this letter is nevertheless indicative of the powerful currents within the Conservative Party which demanded a strong and daring imperial adventure as a response to the post-war catalogue of withdrawals under Labour, most notably India (1947), Palestine (1948) and Abadan (1951).

The closest Eden came to abandoning the search for a peaceful settlement of the base dispute was at the end of 1953, when murderous incidents in the Canal Zone, the increased activities of the Suez Group and Churchill's renewed desire for a military escapade made the Foreign Secretary question his whole Middle Eastern approach: 'I am weary of the fickle friendship of the Arabs,' he gloomily minuted on Christmas Day 1953.[51] According to his private secretary, Eden was seriously

47 TNA, CAB 128/26 CM 58 (53) 4, 15 October 1954.

48 Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 118.

49 TNA, FO 371/102823 JE1192/656G, Churchill to Eden, 11 December 1953.

50 Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 118.

51 Quoted in Y.J. Tenembaum, 'British Policy towards Israel and the Arab–Israeli Dispute 1951–54' (unpublished Oxford DPhil., 1991), p. 298.

considering whether he should 'throw over the Arabs altogether' and instead rely on Turkey and Israel as pillars of Western defence in the Middle East.[52] Churchill was, of course, a Gentile Zionist who never hid his admiration for Jews, even when he had cause to criticize aspects of Zionist – and eventually Israeli – policy. Throughout the Canal Zone crisis, he repeatedly advised Eden to keep open the option of Israel being a military ally. In December 1951, for instance, after a late night of whisky drinking, he had growled, 'Tell them [the Egyptians] that if we have any more of their cheek we will set the Jews on them and drive them back into the gutter, from which they never should have emerged.'[53] Earlier in 1953, when the Chiefs of Staff were re-thinking Britain's Middle East strategic planning, Churchill had railed against the Foreign Office line that nothing should be done to upset Arab opinion: 'The idea of selling Israel down the drain in order to persuade Egypt to kick us out of the Canal Zone more gently is not one which attracts me.'[54] That Eden should contemplate an Israeli connection at the end of 1953 was almost certainly a reaction to the cumulative effects of Churchill's influence, both negatively towards Egypt and positively towards Israel. Moreover, it is not a big leap to surmise that Churchill's shadow in October 1956 was to have a similar influence over Eden after France first mooted the Israeli option which led to the Anglo-French-Israeli collusion at Sèvres. Rather intriguingly, in early 1954 Churchill had gone so far as to suggest that the Canal Zone crisis could be resolved by joining Israel 'in seizing all territory up to and including the Canal', while compensating 'Jordan with a strip of Israel territory the other side'.[55]

Towards a Settlement

At the start of 1954, Eden's senior advisers in the Foreign Office brought him back from the brink of pursuing Israel and at the same time fortified his resolve for reaching a base settlement. Nevertheless, the outlook was bleak. During January and February there was an increased number of incidents in the Canal Zone, stimulated by internal disputes within and between Egypt's military junta and the Muslim Brotherhood.[56] The effect, despite the continuing efforts to keep the casualty figures out of the public domain, was to strengthen Conservative backbench opposition to Eden's conciliatory policy. Even Selwyn Lloyd, a Minister of State at the Foreign Office, switched camps for a while and started supporting a tough approach as advocated by the Suez Group and (not always separately) Churchill.[57] When the leadership struggle inside Egypt's junta spilled over into the open at the end of February, Churchill was as ready as ever to

52 Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 125.

53 Ibid., p. 29.

54 TNA, PREM 11/463 10–11, Churchill to Strang, 23 April 1953.

55 Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 127.

56 On the struggle for ascendancy in Egyptian politics in this period, see Michael T. Thornhill, 'Britain, the United States and the Rise of an Egyptian Leader: The Politics and Diplomacy of Nasser's Consolidation of Power, 1952-4', *English Historical Review*, 119/483 (2004): 892–921.

57 Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 131, and TNA, CAB 129/65 CP (54) 29, 27 January 1954.

advocate a minor war and a guns-blazing retreat. Rioting in Khartoum at the opening of the Sudan's new parliament on 1 March provided the scarcely needed boost.[58]

Despite his reputation for wavering in the face of criticism, it was Eden who stuck firmly to his policy, and indeed proceeded to take a crucial step towards ending the base dispute a few days later. The idea (resurrected by Shuckburgh from Ernest Bevin's period as Foreign Secretary) was to have civilian contractors maintain the base installations after an evacuation agreement, and so bypass the whole uniform dispute. Churchill was predictably unimpressed when the scheme was presented to Cabinet on 15 March. Summing up the Prime Minister's contribution to the discussion, Shuckburgh noted that 'he wanted all the usual things – a brigade to Khartoum, 10,000 men on the Canal, etc. and a break in the negotiations'.[59] A more generally expressed opinion was that the civilian contractors' scheme would be less acceptable to the government's own backbenchers. The evacuation of all troops, noted the Cabinet minutes, 'could easily be presented as a complete surrender to the more extreme demands of the Egyptian government'.[60]

Churchill, however, was clearly worried. The scheme had the potential to circumvent the last remaining hurdle in the base negotiations, provided that the Egyptian political scene became stable enough to push through a new agreement. He consequently set about persuading Britain's most senior soldier, Chief of Imperial General Staff Field Marshal Sir John Harding, that a better solution was to reduce the Suez garrison to the treaty limit of 10,000 and then await international arbitration. Ever the cautious soldier, Harding's only modification to this plan was to argue that 15,000 troops be kept in the reduced base, which, given the arbitration aspect of the plan, defeated its whole purpose.[61] Anyway, buoyed by Harding's defection, Churchill wrote to Eden on 18 March with his mantra of stressing the need 'for deeds, not words, with the Egyptians'.[62] In reply, Eden pointed out that Harding had taken 'a different view' from all the previous ones by the Chiefs of Staff. He also added that leaving 15,000 men in the Canal Zone could easily lead to 'open conflict with Egypt'.[63] The heads of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force must have thought likewise, because they reaffirmed their support for a negotiated settlement on 22 March.[64]

As a consequence, Churchill's main ally at this time proved to be the instability of Egyptian domestic politics, so when Nasser eventually consolidated his rule once and for all, and then proved his credentials in British eyes by bringing about a sustained period of calm in the Canal Zone, the way was laid open for a settlement based on the civilian contractors' scheme. When the British Cabinet discussed a draft 'heads of agreement' on 22 June, Churchill finally conceded that he had accepted the military case for redeployment, but stressed that he remained worried by the political

58 TNA, CAB 128/27 CC (54) 13, 1 March 1954; see also Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 137.

59 Ibid., p. 148.

60 TNA, CAB 128/27 CC (54) 18, 15 March 1954.

61 TNA, PREM 11/701 49–50, Harding to Churchill, 17 March 1954.

62 TNA, PREM 11/701 M 55/54 47, Churchill to Eden, 18 March 1954.

63 TNA, FO 800/775 Eg/54/36, Eden to Churchill, 18 March 1954.

64 TNA, DEFE 4/69 COS (54) 32, 22 March 1954.

disadvantages of abandoning a peacetime position which underpinned Britain's status as a world power. In the discussion that followed, the Cabinet isolated the problem as one of presentation, and took the decision to link the evacuation of Egypt with the advent of the hydrogen bomb, the news of which had stirred public opinion in March (though the first tests were in November 1952).[65] It is important to note, however, that while a mood of impending doom had characterized the British press from late March, the impact on the Canal Zone dispute had been non-existent, and indeed remained so until the Conservative government came up with the idea of presenting the withdrawal from Egypt as a result of a reassessment of strategic needs in the thermonuclear age.

Churchill was thus at last on Eden's side regarding Egyptian matters, even to the point of using his influence at a meeting of the Conservative Party's Army Committee on 13 July. But to the very end he remained unconvinced by the political arguments: 'Well, I did your dirty work for you,' he commented afterwards to one Foreign Office official.[66] None the less, the Suez Group had lost its Cabinet champion, and within two weeks an agreement was reached with Egypt. When this was debated in the Commons on 29 July, Churchill defended his U-turn and previous obstructiveness (he was taunted into doing so) by making the most of the hydrogen bomb argument:

> I have not in the slightest degree concealed in public speech how much I regretted the course of events in Egypt. But I had not held my mind closed to the tremendous changes that have taken place in the whole strategic position in the world which makes the thoughts that were well formed and well knit together a year ago utterly obsolete and which have changed the opinions of every competent soldier that I have been able to meet.[67]

But the Suez Group was not fooled by this political spin: 'If the hydrogen bomb is making our position in the Suez Canal completely untenable,' Captain Charles Waterhouse asked, not unreasonably, 'why have we been fiercely arguing for six, eight or ten months about the power of re-entry?' Julian Amery added – and this had always been the key point for the opponents to a evacuation agreement – that there were political interests to uphold, apart from any military rationales for withdrawal. Britain, he argued, must also 'consider what will happen if there is no war'.[68]

Conclusion

Although always likely to be a contentious subject, fathoming Eden's behaviour in 1956 certainly becomes clearer once an understanding of his relationship with Churchill over the Canal Zone dispute of 1951 to 1954 is brought into the picture. As stated earlier, the semantics of this Anglo-Egyptian struggle are absolutely crucial. Scholarly accounts of 'defence negotiations' leading to a 'defence agreement' fail to comprehend fully the enormous pressures acting on Eden at the time. Rather,

65 TNA, CAB 128 CC (54) 43, 22 June 1954.

66 The comment was made to Frank Roberts and is reported in Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 224.

67 *Hansard*, 5th series, *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 531, col. 750, 29 July 1954.

68 Ibid., cols 743 and 772.

his advocacy of disengagement was pursued in the context of what amounted to an undeclared colonial emergency; the Suez garrison was effectively under siege. To a Conservative Party obsessed with the lessons of the 1930s, this approach bore a striking resemblance to the appeasement of Nazi Germany, at least to imperial diehards, not least Churchill. Eden's behaviour in risking his ascendancy to the premiership by pushing through a withdrawal agreement thus showed immense strength of character (not something for which he is known), as well as an acute understanding of Britain's reduced capabilities in the post-1945 era. Ironically, Eden had been motivated by the belief that staying put in the Canal Zone would create an irredentist problem which would sooner or later draw Britain into another full-scale occupation of Egypt. He pursued this conciliatory policy, moreover, despite serious, indeed almost fatal, health problems. The widespread belief that illness was a key factor affecting his judgement in 1956 should therefore be set aside, or at least modified. Far more important an influence, however, was Churchill, especially in connection to the appeasement debates of the 1930s and their resonances in the fraught ministerial discussions of how to respond to the Egyptian insurgency of 1951–54. Churchill (and others in the Conservative Party) craved a short colonial war, partly as a method for resolving Britain's difficulties in the Middle East, but also as an imperial reflex to a succession of post-war retreats. Eden was able to swim against these powerful currents as Foreign Secretary, but succumbed to the flow after he belatedly took over as Prime Minister. It is, of course, impossible to say whether appearing Churchillian in a national crisis would have been a legacy for any immediate Conservative successor to the lauded war leader. For Eden, however, with his multifaceted and obscured associations with 'appeasement' in its 1930s and 1950s varieties, the pressure not to do otherwise proved too intense.

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Chapter 3

Britain and the Suez Crisis: The Abadan Dimension

Peter J. Beck[1]

Fifty years on, the Suez crisis remains a landmark British event presented as exerting significant impacts upon Britain's policy and role in the world. More recently, the bitter controversies surrounding the 2003 Iraq War, like the range of commemorative activities marking its fiftieth anniversary in 2006, showed that 'Suez', like 'Munich', retains a strong resonance in contemporary Britain.[2] By contrast, in 2001 the fiftieth anniversary of another British reversal in the Middle East, the 1951 Anglo-Iranian Abadan crisis, passed almost unnoticed. Indeed, notwithstanding the publications of Wm. Roger Louis and a spate of recent studies drawing upon files previously subject to extended closure, this earlier dispute, centred upon the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), has been pushed to the margins of histories of Britain, if not completely obscured, by the subsequent Suez Affair. Nor does 'Abadan' strike any real political chord in today's Britain in spite of Iran's recent re-emergence as an international focus. By contrast, in Iran, where 'Oil Nationalization Day' is still celebrated, Mohammad Mossadeq, the prime minister at the time, has acquired an iconic status casting a long shadow over the country's political history.[3]

Against this background, why study the Abadan dimension of the Suez crisis? Quite apart from what Gorst and Johnman describe as 'interesting parallels' arising from their Middle East location and the fact of the nationalization of companies with substantial British government shareholdings, does Abadan rate a stop as one of the 'staging posts' (Thorpe) *en route* to Suez, as implied by the opening pages

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2 For example, see Robin Cook, *The Point of Departure* (London, 2003), p. 203, p. 224; Robin Cook, 'The invasion of Iraq was Britain's worst foreign policy blunder since Suez', *The Independent*, 19 March 2004.

3 Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East* (New York, 2006), p. 263; Ali Ansari, 'Iran and the US in the shadow of 9/11: Persia and the Persian question revisited', *Iranian Studies*, 39/2 (2006): 161, note 15.

of Keith Kyle's history?[4] The dispute reached a crisis point in 1951, when the Iranian government headed by Mossadeq nationalized the AIOC (May) and forced Britain's evacuation of the vast Abadan refinery (October). Eventually, in August 1953, Mossadeq's fall from power, arising from a covert Anglo-American operation, prepared the way for a settlement in August 1954. Iran's oil industry remained nationalized, but henceforth effective control was exercised by an international consortium, including five American companies, but leaving the AIOC (renamed British Petroleum Company, 1954) as the largest single stakeholder.

Investigating Suez's Abadan Dimension

Kyle's book did little to alter the fact that hitherto, Suez's Abadan dimension, like the Cairo–Tehran link, has been covered in only a fragmentary fashion.[5] Existing publications have done little more than to indicate questions warranting further investigation:

- Was Louis correct in identifying a cause-and-effect relationship, when arguing that Britain's decision to evacuate Abadan, not to intervene militarily, 'became one of the root causes of the Suez crisis five years later'?[6] In this vein, did Norman Kemp identify the key point when concluding that 'to other small countries where dissentient opinion preached against the British, the shattering triumph of the weak Iranian nation was a textbook example'?[7]
- Were the Abadan and Suez crises 'contrasting yet largely complementary' chapters in the history of Britain's withdrawal from the Middle East, as argued by Rohan Butler, the Foreign Office's historian?[8] Did the 1951 Abadan crisis represent – to quote Steve Marsh – 'a microcosm' of Britain's post-1945 Middle Eastern conundrum, most notably epitomizing the type of questions posed for British policymakers by economic weakness, the problematic American relationship, and escalating nationalist pressures?[9] Despite David Goldsworthy's claim that 'at no stage up to the time of Suez did *all* these relevant factors come together in a way that might cause Britain

4 Anthony Gorst and Lewis Johnman (eds), *The Suez Crisis* (London, 1997), p. 25; D.R. Thorpe, *Eden: The Life and Times of Anthony Eden, 1897–1977* (London, 2003), p. 489; Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London, 2003), pp. 7–9.

5 H.W. Brands, 'The Cairo–Tehran connection in Anglo-American rivalry in the Middle East, 1951–1953', *The International History Review*, 11/3 (1989): 434–56.

6 Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford, 1984), p. 668. See also Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, n.d. (1989–91), Suez Oral History Project (SUEZOHP) 20, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, p. 4.

7 Norman Kemp, *Abadan: A First-hand Account of the Persian Oil Crisis* (London, 1953), p. 238.

8 Rohan Butler, September 1962, p. 308, TNA, FO 370/2694/LS18/3.

9 Steve Marsh, 'HMG, AIOC and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis: In defence of Anglo-Iranian', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 12/4 (2001): 146; Steve Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil: Crisis in Iran* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 1–8.

serious difficulty', did Abadan pre-empt Suez, even serving as a kind of dress rehearsal for 1956?[10]

- In turn, did Abadan provide lessons capable of helping British policymakers either to avoid or to deal better with any future challenge to Britain's position in the Middle East? Echoing Marsh's identification of the Abadan dispute as 'a major test of Anglo-American relations', Bertjan Verbeek argued that 'the events in Iran between 1951 and 1954 could have taught Great Britain some important lessons'.[11] In particular, as Scott Lucas recorded, 'general Anglo-American agreement on the Middle East could still be subverted by differences in specific cases, especially the Iranian and Egyptian "crises"'.[12] Given its mistaken assumptions about Washington's response to developments in 1956, should Anthony Eden's government have been more punctilious in assessing, and then taking note of, the American government's *actual attitude*, perhaps following the example of Attlee's government in rejecting a military solution over Abadan?[13] Attlee's rejection of force, though explained partly by military shortcomings and fears about being drawn into an extended conflict within Iran, was dictated primarily by a belief that Britain 'could not afford to break with the United States on an issue of this kind'.[14] For Attlee, Britain's Middle Eastern agenda and priorities must not be allowed to diverge too far from Washington's Cold War geopolitical perspectives. In 1956, the Eden government faced – to quote Michael Thornhill – 'a similar predicament' concerning the USA.[15]
- For Ian Speller, 'the non-use of military force during the Abadan crisis in 1951 is as interesting and instructive as its use five years later against Egypt'.[16] Given the serious constraints – these included Britain's lack of an amphibious capability and proximate bases – and delays handicapping Operation Musketeer in 1956, should policymakers have used military lessons drawn from the Abadan crisis to build up 'a modern, flexible intervention capability'?[17] In the event,

10 David Goldsworthy, 'Keeping Change within bounds: Aspects of colonial policy during the Churchill and Eden Governments, 1951–57', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 18/1 (1990): 103.

11 Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations*, p. 37; Bertjan Verbeek, *Decision-making in Great Britain during the Suez Crisis: Small Groups and a Persistent Leader* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 53.

12 W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1991), p. 12.

13 According to Sir Roger Makins (later Lord Sherfield), the British Ambassador in Washington, Macmillan's meeting with President Eisenhower on 25 September 1956 proved a cursory encounter regarding Suez: Lord Sherfield, 'Sidelights on Suez: the Makins experience', n.d., p. 7, MS Sherfield 957; Lord Sherfield to Piers Dixon, 4 October 1992, MS Sherfield 970. The Sherfield Papers (MS Sherfield) are located at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

14 Meeting 60(51), 27 September 1951, TNA, CAB 128/20, fols 55–7.

15 Michael T. Thornhill, *Road to Suez: The Battle of the Canal Zone* (Stroud, 2006), p. 219.

16 Ian Speller, '"A splutter of musketry?": The British military response to the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute, 1951', *Contemporary British History*, 17/1 (2003): 40.

17 Ian Speller, *The Role of Amphibious Warfare in British Defence Policy, 1945–56* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 101, 119–25.

continued neglect, compounded by a growing reliance upon the nuclear option, ensured that in 1956, as in 1951, Britain still lacked the mobile sea-based striking force required for measured and timely military responses to unforeseen contingencies.

- Alternatively, did a 1953-style Iranian coup offer better prospects of regime change than the approach adopted by Eden to unseat Nasser in 1956?[18] Or did developments in Iran – for most commentators, the coup did little to enhance the USA's position therein – post a warning about Western intervention?[19]
- According to Sue Onslow, Abadan proved a significant 'formative' experience for the Conservative Party's Suez Group in terms of identifying those who saw the Middle East as Britain's 'new Empire': 'As far as the Suez Group was concerned, Abadan was the "preparatory exercise" in the Conservative Party's future relations with Egypt.'[20] Led by Charles Waterhouse and Julian Amery, the group interpreted developments in Egypt, Iran and Palestine as part of an unacceptable story of appeasement, scuttle and withdrawal. In 1951, Amery, who later described Abadan as 'the beginning' for the Suez Group, feared for the future: 'Events in Persia have thrown a flood of light on the extent of our weakness in the Middle East. Is that light only a warning, or is it the first flame of a conflagration which may spread throughout the region?'[21] Pressing the case for a firm line based upon a position of strength in the region, henceforth the Suez Group exerted varying impacts upon the nature and presentation of British policy towards Egypt, most notably compelling Eden in 1956 to avoid giving any impression of either scaling down Britain's Middle East role or appeasing Nasser.

There are, of course, other questions, but this chapter confines itself to *selective examples* illuminating the case for drawing the Abadan dimension more into studies of Britain and the Suez crisis. In fact, the Egyptian side of this story has been equally under-researched, even if there are – to quote Laura James, author of *Nasser's War* – 'tantalising hints of the use of the Mossadeq analogy in Nasser's thinking': 'But in none of my sources could I pin down anything really concrete – which, given

18 Wm. Roger Louis, 'Britain and the overthrow of the Mosaddeq government', in Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (eds), *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse, NY, 2004), pp. 126–77; 'Document: A Very British Coup', BBC Radio 4, 22 August 2005.

19 Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, p. 27, pp. 36–45; Wm. Roger Louis, 'Mussaddiq and the dilemmas of British imperialism', in J.A. Bill and Wm. R. Louis (eds), *Mussaddiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil* (London, 1988), pp. 255–6.

20 Sue Onslow, *Backbench Debate within the Conservative Party and its Influence on British Foreign Policy, 1948–57* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 121, 141–50, 228–34; Sue Onslow, '"Battlelines for Suez": The Abadan Crisis of 1951 and the formation of the Suez Group', *Contemporary British History*, 17/2 (2003): 1–28.

21 Julian Amery, 12 June 1989, SUEZOHP 1, pp. 3–4; *Hansard (Commons)*, vol. 491, col. 1025, 30 July 1951.

the inadequacy of said sources, is certainly not to say that it wasn't a factor!'[22] For example, when Nasser informed ministers about the forthcoming nationalization decree, reportedly, 'More than one minister mentioned Mossadeq.'[23] Looking back to Iran's difficulties in marketing its recently nationalized oil – these problems arose principally from the Western boycott and the availability of alternative supplies – Nasser pointed to the lack of any real alternative for the Suez Canal and the fact that he had learnt the importance of maintaining free passage to limit external opposition. Further hearsay evidence derives from Sir Roy Welensky, the former Prime Minister of Rhodesia:

> I believe that the end of the British Empire really was signalled by that miserable old Persian Mossadeq, when he thumbed his nose at the British over the oil refinery at Abadan. A friend of mine who spoke to Nasser said that Nasser said to him: 'You British from that moment no longer retained any respect. If Mossadeq could do that to you why couldn't the rest of us?' and how right he proved.[24]

Abadan, Suez and Foreign Office Histories

In February 1959, the Foreign Office selected Abadan, not the high-profile Suez Affair, as the subject of a confidential departmental history commissioned as part of a broader initiative testing history's utility as an input to the Whitehall policymaking process. As Rohan Butler, the Foreign Office's historian, remarked, Suez was deemed too sensitive even for the shortlist.[25] Completed by Butler in 1962, the Abadan history fed into ongoing debates about British policy and methods in the wake of the Suez debacle. Despite the history's British–Iranian focus, the resulting commentaries by ministers and officials were filtered in part through the subsequent experience of living through the Suez Affair. Indeed, many readers realized that key themes revealed by Butler's history were echoed in 1956: limitations upon British power, most notably a declining capacity for independent military action; growing dependence upon the USA, and the serious challenge posed by emergent anti-British nationalism. In this manner, the Abadan history enabled, indeed positively encouraged, policymakers to articulate their views about Suez, which was treated otherwise as off limits even for a confidential internal history.[26]

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22 Laura James to the author, 28 February 2007; Laura James, *Nasser at War: Arab Images of the Enemy* (Basingstoke, 2006).

23 Mohamedh Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes* (London, 1986), pp. 124–5, 133; Amin Hewedy, 'Nasser and the crisis of 1956', in Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds), *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford, 1989), p. 166.

24 Sir Roy Welensky to Sarah Millin, 15 February 1964, 760/4, fol. 27, Welensky Papers. The Welensky Papers are located at The Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford. Welensky proved one of Eden's regular correspondents in his retirement, with Suez often figuring in their exchanges.

25 Butler, September 1962, p. 2, TNA, FO 370/2694/LS18/3.

26 Peter J. Beck, *Using History, Making British Policy: The Treasury and the Foreign Office, 1950–76* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 233–8.

As a result, Butler's history, together with the resulting exchanges thereupon, offers one framework for studying Suez's Abadan dimension. Regardless of the reasons explaining Britain's evacuation of Abadan, Butler pointed to the way in which the failure to use force, compounded by extensive media coverage of a humiliating withdrawal, undermined images of British power and prestige in the Middle East: 'The relative British decline and American ascendancy in the Middle East generally (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Greece, Turkey) extended to Persia and underlay the Abadan Crisis.'[27] Quoting from Eden's recently published memoirs to the effect that 'the troubles fomented on the Shatt al Arab, festered on the Nile', Butler presented events in Iran as stimulating 'strong political currents' working against British interests throughout the region – this point was confirmed by Sir John Troutbeck and H.G. Jakins in Baghdad and Kuwait respectively – but the 'gravest and most prompt repercussion of the British eviction from Abadan occurred in Egypt with special significance for the British position on the Suez Canal'.[28] Within days of evacuating Abadan (3 October), the British government was confronted by Egypt's denunciation of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty (8 October) as well as serious unrest in the Suez Canal Zone.[29] One former RAF officer complained to Attlee:

> Every little nation just sticks its tongue out at us … Having made us the laughing stock of the world over the Persian Oil affair today brings us news of the first result of your government's weakness. Egypt is tearing up her treaty with us. Egypt will throw us out of the Suez region.[30]

Even worse, in November 1951 the Egyptian and Iranian governments showed signs of uniting against 'British imperialism' following Mossadeq's stopover in Cairo *en route* from New York. Received by 'a frenzy of emotion' (McGhee), Mossadeq used the visit – to quote the British ambassador in Cairo – 'to present a picture of two small but gallant countries struggling to free themselves from the shackles of blood-sucking imperialism'.[31]

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27 Butler, September 1962, p. 309, TNA, FO 370/2694/LS18/3.

28 Butler, September 1962, pp. 289, 291, 307, TNA, FO 370/2694/LS18/3; Anthony Eden, *The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden: Full Circle* (London, 1960), p. 195. In October 1951, Jakins, the British Political Agent in Kuwait, reported local 'talk of the decline of the British' reflecting 'a belief that it was merely necessary to bark loudly and lengthily enough to make the British let go anywhere'; Simon C. Smith, *Kuwait, 1950–65: Britain, the al-Sabah, and Oil* (Oxford, 1999), p. 67.

29 Thornhill, *Road to Suez*, pp. 32–70.

30 S.H. Cottis to Attlee, 9 October 1951, TNA, FO 371/90142/JE1051.

31 George McGhee, *Envoy to the Middle World: Adventures in Diplomacy* (New York, 1983), p. 404; Ralph Skrine Stevenson to Eden, 3 December 1951, FO 371/91474/EP10316.

Predicting 1956 in 1951

Subsequently, the experience of living through the Suez crisis led some to point to the prescience demonstrated by those, like Leo Amery, urging the Attlee government *at the time* to 'show that the lion has claws and teeth as well as a tail to be twisted'.[32] Looking back in his memoirs to 1951, when he warned the Attlee government 'that this sort of piracy should be stopped, for there were others watching and all too ready to try their hands at the game of snatch and grab', Lord Home, a prominent member of Eden's 1955–57 government, concluded that 'we were to pay dearly for failing to stop Mossadeq at once'.[33] In fact, some Labour ministers took a similar line. For example, in May 1951, as Iran ratcheted up its pressure against the AIOC, Emanuel Shinwell, the Minister of Defence (1950–51), stressed the need 'to show that our tail could not be twisted interminably'.[34] Like Herbert Morrison, the Foreign Secretary (1951), Shinwell feared that 'if Persia was allowed to get away with it, Egypt and other Middle East countries would be encouraged to think that they could try things on: the next thing might be an attempt to nationalise the Suez Canal'. In August, Makins, then a deputy under-secretary at the Foreign Office, advised: 'The dispute with Persia has dealt a heavy blow to our prestige … *We cannot afford another mistake of this magnitude* [author's emphasis].'[35] Significantly, in 1956, when acting as British Ambassador in Washington, Makins witnessed just such 'another mistake'. At the crucial Cabinet meeting, held on 27 September 1951, Morrison's demand for action to stop 'our people' being pushed around by Iran was reinforced by warnings about the resulting 'humiliation' and – to quote from Brook's recently released Cabinet notebooks – 'Talk now in E. [Egypt] of nationalisg. Suez Canal'.[36] In the event, Morrison's hawkish 'pseudo-Pam' stance was seconded by Shinwell – he complained that 'we have floundered around all thro'' – but elicited minimal support from Cabinet colleagues.[37]

The Conservative Opposition pushed for a stronger approach. Speaking in May 1951, Eden attacked the government's policy towards Iran in emotive warmongering terms: 'That was appeasement at its worst. We had been pushed around a little too much of late … We should call a halt to that process.'[38] Unsurprisingly, when launching the party's general election campaign on the eve of Britain's evacuation

32 Leo Amery to Eden, 26 May 1951, AP 14/3/56. The Lord Avon papers (AP) are located at the Library, University of Birmingham. For Leo Amery, Iran's action represented an 'excellent precedent' for nationalizing the Suez Canal; John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, 1929–1945* (London, 1988), p. 1063.

33 Lord Home, *The Way the Wind Blows* (London, 1978), p. 98.

34 Shinwell, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 23 May 1951, COS(51) 86th Meeting, TNA, DEFE 4/43.

35 R. Makins, 11 August 1951, TNA, FO 371/124968/ZP24/2.

36 Brook's Cabinet notebooks, 27 September 1951, CAB 195/9/1, p. 202; meeting 60(51), TNA, CAB 128/20, fols 55–7.

37 Cabinet notebook, 27 September 1951, TNA, CAB 195/9/1, p. 204; Hugh Dalton's diary, 16 September 1951, 1/42, fols 7–8. 'Pseudo-Pam' referred to Lord Palmerston. Dalton's diary is located at the Archives, London School of Economics.

38 *The Times*, 25 May 1951.

from Abadan, Winston Churchill assured voters that a Conservative government would have done things differently.[39] Subsequently, as Prime Minister, Churchill liked to point to the firm policy adopted by his government towards the Middle East: 'we have followed out the resolute policy of the late Government and have not hesitated to fire at Ismailia and elsewhere the decisive volley. How different would the position have been if the late Government had not flinched from doing this at Abadan.'[40] As Churchill complained to Dean Acheson, the American Secretary of State, Attlee's government 'had scuttled and run from Abadan when a splutter of musketry would have settled the matter'.[41] Whether or not a Churchill-led government would have made any real difference in 1951 remains questionable, given the problematic nature of the American attitude and Britain's military deficiencies.

Looking Back to Abadan from Suez

Of course, in 1956 the lessons of the Abadan dispute, though impacting in varying degrees upon policymakers' mindsets, had yet to be codified formally in the way undertaken by Butler during the early 1960s. To some extent, this gap was filled in 1957 by a Foreign Office study prepared on 'the lessons of Suez' at Eden's request by Guy Millard, his private secretary. Significantly, when commissioning the project, Eden acknowledged Britain's economic and military shortcomings, but still opined that Britain was capable of playing 'an independent part in the world'.[42] For Eden, Suez, not Abadan, represented a watershed: 'we must review our world position and our domestic capacity more searchingly in the light of the Suez experience, which has not so much changed our fortunes as revealed realities'.

In the event, Millard's lengthy study – the final version was revised in the light of Eden's comments – ranged more widely than Suez, such as to identify the manner in which 'strong memories of Abadan' *appeared* to influence British and Egyptian policymakers in 1956. Like other commentators, Millard saw Iran's example as reinforcing Egypt's 'intense nationalism' by demonstrating that 'the "imperialist" Powers could successfully be defied'.[43] Conversely, an appreciation of the damage inflicted upon British interests and prestige in the Middle East by events in 1951 'made the Government and the Conservative Party very sensitive to criticisms of weakness in the face of Middle Eastern nationalism and Egyptian ambition':

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39 *The Times*, 3 October 1951.

40 Churchill to Eden, 19 August 1952, TNA, PREM 11/392; Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez, Diaries 1951–56*, ed. John Charmley (London, 1986), p. 75; Michael Mason, '"The decisive volley": The battle of Ismailia and the decline of British influence in Egypt, January–July 1952', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 19/1 (1991): 48–51.

41 Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (London, 1970), p. 599; Churchill to Eden, 15 February 1952, TNA, PREM 11/91, fols 150–51.

42 Encl. F. Bishop to D. Laskey, 28 December 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1138.

43 Millard, 21 October 1957, pp. 1–2, 29, TNA, FO 800/728; Brook to Eden, 30 October 1957, TNA, CAB 21/4960; Brook, 8 November 1957, TNA, PREM 11/3332.

> Successive retreats in Asia and the Middle East had made further retreats increasingly repugnant … *An earlier crisis had left strong memories of Abadan. Their lesson seemed to be that in the defence of important British interests it is sometimes necessary to take risks* [author's italics].

Millard reminded readers also that, as happened with Abadan, London and Washington entered the Suez crisis with conflicting attitudes and policies. Even worse, in 1956 the divide widened as the crisis escalated.

Macmillan, Eden and Abadan

Millard's claims about Abadan's apparent influence upon British policymakers' mindsets were not referenced, but appear more applicable to Macmillan, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1955–57), than Eden. Despite playing an active role towards the Abadan crisis both in opposition and in power, in 1956 Eden's thinking seemed more influenced by the Abyssinian, Rhineland and Munich crises of the 1930s than by events at Abadan. Hitler and Mussolini, not Mossadeq, represented influential reference points when confronting Nasser: 'The lessons of the 'thirties and their application to the 'fifties … are the themes of my memoirs.'[44]

Moreover, as Prime Minister, Eden appeared reluctant to act upon his 1953 post-Abadan review of policy towards Egypt:

> In the second half of the 20th century we cannot hope to maintain our position in the Middle East by the methods of the last century. However little we like it, we must face that fact. Commercial concessions whose local benefit appears to redound mainly to the Shahs and Pashas no longer serve in the same way to strengthen our influence in those countries, and they come increasingly under attack by local nationalist opinion. Military occupation could be maintained by force, but in the case of Egypt the base upon which it depends is of little use if there is no local labour to man it. We have learned the first lesson in Persia: we are learning the second in Egypt.[45]

The fast rising 'tide of nationalism', as evidenced already in Iran, meant that 'future policy must be designed to harness these movements rather than to struggle against them'. In 1954, the Suez Canal Zone Agreement, though partly intended to relieve military overstretch, can be interpreted in part as Eden's attempt to begin putting these principles into practice.

In this vein, in April 1956 the escalating threat posed by Nasser led Sir Norman Brook, the Cabinet Secretary, to remind Eden about his 1953 Cabinet Paper: 'These considerations are as true today as they were three years ago. These are the principles which should, I believe, guide our policy in the Middle East. I wonder whether, even

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44 Eden, *Full Circle*, foreword, pp. 431, 518; David Dutton, *Anthony Eden: A Life and Reputation* (London, 1997), pp. 1–19. See Eden to President Eisenhower, 1 October 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1102, fol. 262; Eden to Viscount Chandos, 29 September 1959, AP 23/17/36B.

45 Anthony Eden, 'Egypt: The Alternatives', 16 February 1953, C(53) 65, TNA, CAB 129/59, fols 67–8.

now, we have discovered how to apply them in practice.'[46] Eden was far from pleased to be reminded about his earlier text, let alone its possible relevance to present-day problems: 'I wish I could say that the PM received your views with delight, or even appreciation … he did not feel that the general principle you suggested could easily or safely be applied.'[47] For Eden, Nasser's recent actions, most notably the Czech arms agreement and his alleged responsibility for Glubb Pasha's dismissal, had transformed the nature and seriousness of the problem.[48] Furthermore, a paper-thin temperament reinforced his sensitivity to criticism, most notably the Suez Group's depiction of him as a Chamberlainite appeaser guilty of negotiating British withdrawal from the Suez Canal Zone.[49]

Soon afterwards, the resulting Suez crisis, in which Nasser not only posed a more demanding challenge than Mossadeq but also sought to learn from his mistakes, led Eden deliberately to avoid 'the long, dismal, drawling tides of drift and surrender' characterizing Attlee's approach towards Abadan.[50] Indeed, Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, who worked as Private Secretary for both Morrison and Eden, pointed to Abadan's 'dreadful legacy' in terms of proving 'one of the roots of the Suez Crisis'.[51] Recalling how Eden became 'terribly worried about being a called a scuttler', Shuckburgh recorded his 'determination to show himself responsible and strong', not an appeaser. Most dictators, Eden believed, were 'unnegotiable': 'Among them I would put Hitler, Mussolini, Sukarno, Musaddiq and Nasser. Attempts to satisfy their appetite only increase them.'[52] What Eden had written prior to the 1953 Iranian coup seemed very relevant when faced by Nasser in 1956: 'I thought we should be better occupied looking for alternatives to Musaddiq rather than trying to buy him off.'[53]

Harold Macmillan, who proved a principal player in 1956 in terms of being depicted as the first in and the first out regarding the use of force, displayed even greater awareness of the Abadan dimension. As he informed Robert Murphy, the American Deputy Under-Secretary of State, on 29 July 1956, Britain was not to be regarded as a lesser power like the Netherlands.[54] Murphy was 'left in no doubt that the British Government believed that Suez was a test which could be met only by the use of force'. Drawing upon a 'graphic dissertation on British past history', Macmillan asserted that 'to do another Munich' would merely result in 'progressive deterioration of ME position and … inevitable disaster'.[55] Soon afterwards, Macmillan's exchanges with Edward Bridges, Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, reaffirmed Abadan's impact upon his thinking:

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46 Brook to Eden, 14 April 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1457.

47 F. Bishop to Brook, 15 April 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1457.

48 Thorpe, *Eden*, pp. 501–8.

49 Dutton, *Eden*, pp. 356–63; Onslow, '"Battlelines for Suez"', pp. 21–2.

50 Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 203.

51 Shuckburgh, n.d. (1989–91), SUEZOHP 20, pp. 4–5; Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 17.

52 Lord Avon to Lord Salisbury, 19 February 1970, AP23/60/171.

53 Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 213.

54 Robert Murphy, *Diplomat among Warriors* (London, 1964), p. 463.

55 Murphy to Dulles, 31 July 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955–57*, vol. XVI (Washington, DC, 1988), pp. 60–62.

> The problem is simple to state - difficult to solve. We *must* either obtain a diplomatic success, which will eventually mean that Nasser will go *the way of Mossadeq* [author's emphasis]; or impose our will by force. If we fail in *both* I think our strength and life will begin to wither away. The general view in the Middle East and East is that the Europeans – particularly the British - have 'had it'. That is what this row is really about.[56]

Reporting to the Cabinet on 28 August 1956 about Suez's economic implications, Macmillan drew upon Abadan when reminding colleagues that the example of Mossadeq should warn them about assuming that the actions of Middle East states would be governed by commercial self-interest as opposed to nationalist aspirations.[57]

For Macmillan, Britain's great power status was largely a function of its Middle East role, as he had stressed already in January 1956 following reports of Nasser's manoeuvrings in Jordan: 'we have got to win. For the stakes are very high – no less than the economic survival of Britain. For if we lose out in the M East, we lose the oil. If we lose the oil, we cannot live.'[58] Already a visit to Abadan in 1947 had reinforced Macmillan's awareness of the vital importance of the region's oil for Britain.[59] Winding up for the Opposition the major parliamentary debate on the Middle East held in July 1951, Macmillan presented Egypt and Iran as part of the same problem. Diary entries highlighted his concerns.[60] For Macmillan, drift in foreign policy had adverse consequences, even suggesting that Britain was 'finished', 'the sun had set': 'Poor Britain is knocked about all over the place. We cave in to the Egyptians. The Persians (and next the Iraqis) are to seize our oil (under the cover of "nationalisation"). We have no power, no credit, no authority abroad.'[61] Nor did Washington escape unscathed, as evidenced by Macmillan's irritation when Acheson urged calm, 'As if we were two Balkan countries being lectured in 1911 by Sir Edward Grey!'[62] Writing upon the day Abadan was evacuated, Macmillan acknowledged the Egyptian linkage when articulating his fears that the Suez Canal Zone would soon follow, thereby threatening Britain's whole position in the region.[63] Another Abadan-type climb-down must be avoided.

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56 Macmillan to Bridges, 16 August 1956, TNA, T 273/380.

57 Cabinet, 28 August 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1104, fol. 141.

58 MS Macmillan, dep. d.25, Diary 12 January 1956, fol. 5. Macmillan's papers (MS Macmillan) are located at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

59 MS Macmillan, dep. d.4, letters 3–4, n.d. (January 1947), fols 10, 23.

60 *Hansard (Commons)*, vol. 491, cols 1050–62, 30 July 1951; MS Macmillan, dep. c.12/1, 29 November 1950, fol. 37; MS Macmillan, dep. c.13/1, 2 October 1951, fol. 78; Harold Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune, 1945–1955* (London, 1969), pp. 347–51.

61 MS Macmillan, dep. c.13/1, 12–17 March 1951, fols 24–5; MS Macmillan, dep. c.13/1, 31 May–2 June 1951, fol. 48; MS Macmillan, dep. c.13/1, 8 July 1951, fol. 57; Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, pp. 350–51.

62 MS Macmillan, dep. c.13/1, 17 May 1951, fols 46–7; MS Macmillan, dep. c.14/1, 27 September 1952, fol. 90.

63 MS Macmillan, dep. c.13/1, 3 October 1951, fol. 79.

Conclusion

From the British point of view, the Suez crisis is still viewed negatively, even if Eden continued to see things differently, as evidenced by the way in which he presented subsequent events, most notably the 1967 Six Day War, as vindicating his actions in 1956.[64] Although the 1954 treaty with Iran resulted eventually in what was interpreted in Britain as a reasonable outcome, generally speaking Abadan was, and still is, interpreted as another British policy failure.[65] Certainly, at the time, Britain's evacuation was presented as epitomizing what *The Times*' editorial described as fundamental 'Faults in diplomacy':

> An opportunity of learning from mistakes rarely presents itself on this scale … It is not a failure that Britain can afford to repeat … the lessons of a muddle have to be learned so what happened in Persia will not be allowed to happen – as it could easily happen – elsewhere.[66]

Following Nasser's action in July 1956, Morrison, Attlee's much-criticized Foreign Secretary, was among the first to remind Eden about Suez's Abadan dimension. Speaking in Parliament on 2 August, he moved on from comparing Nasser to Mossadeq – by contrast, Hugh Gaitskell, who had recently defeated Morrison for the party leadership, cited Hitler and Mussolini as reference points – to reproach Eden for 'an excessive policy of appeasement' towards 'this pocket dictator in Cairo'.[67] Seeking revenge for Conservative attacks in 1951, subsequently Morrison used his memoirs to gloat that in 1956 'the Conservatives then found themselves in the same predicament as the Labour Government at the time of the Abadan Crisis: doubts about the military's ability to mount effective and quick action' compounded by Washington's opposition to the use of force.[68] Unsurprisingly, he rejoiced that 'whatever is said about Abadan the Labour Government did not get into the troubles and complications of the Tories over Suez'.

Writing in 1951 about Britain's evacuation of Abadan, Macmillan opined that henceforth 'we shall have to walk warily between the Scylla of "appeasement" and the Charybdis of "warmongering"'.[69] Marking yet another chapter in the perennial appeasement/warmongering controversy, 'Abadan' offered policymakers, politicians and commentators a useful reference point when debating British policy towards the Middle East. Just as Lord Hankey, like other members of the Suez Group, used 'Abadan' in 1953–54 to warn the Churchill government about withdrawal from the

64 Avon to Selwyn Lloyd, 22 June 1967, SELO 6/202, Selwyn Lloyd Papers (SELO), Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge; Avon to Welensky, 14 August 1967, 730/2, fol. 9, Welensky Papers. Selwyn Lloyd, Eden's Foreign Secretary (1955–57) agreed: 'My case for Suez '56', *News of the World*, 2 July 1967.

65 Beck, *Using History*, p. 195.

66 *The Times*, 5 October 1951.

67 *Hansard*, 2 August 1956, vol. 557, cols 1654–8.

68 Lord Morrison of Lambeth, *Herbert Morrison: An Autobiography* (London, 1960), pp. 282–3.

69 MS Macmillan, dep. c.13/1, 3 October 1951, fol. 79.

Suez Canal Zone – Hankey feared that Britain was 'heading straight for a disaster far more serious than the evacuation of Abadan' – so 'Abadan' figured prominently in parliamentary inquests about Suez.[70] As Robert Mellish, formerly a parliamentary private secretary in the Attlee government, recorded midway through the two-day Suez debate in May 1957, 'Abadan has been mentioned again and again.'[71] Whereas many Labour MPs presented 'Abadan' as an approach which 'ought to have been the policy in dealing with … Nasser' (M. Philips Price) in preference to belligerent 'Tory imperialism', Sir Robert Grimston, a member of the Suez Group, was among Conservative backbenchers ridiculing the view that the episode represented 'a triumph of Socialist common sense'.[72] Rather, as Waterhouse argued, the Attlee government was guilty of a 'crashing error' in scuttling from Abadan.[73]

For historians and international relations specialists focusing upon Suez, the often-ignored Abadan crisis offers a range of invaluable insights regarding Britain's post-1945 policy, power and role; the emerging challenge of anti-British nationalism; the problematic Anglo-American relationship; the role of clandestine intelligence activities; the vital importance of Middle East oil; the interface between big business and government; the evolving role of the UN and the World Bank in international politics; the contrasting priorities of British political parties and government departments; the BBC's place in government propaganda, and political leadership in Britain. Thus, there is, to quote Louis, 'much to be learned from the Persian oil crisis', particularly appertaining to the Suez crisis.[74] Conversely, Suez's impact upon British–Iranian relations warrants further investigation in the light of the Shah's hostility towards Nasser and Iran's active role in the crisis through membership of both the five-power Menzies' mission to Cairo (August 1956) and the six-power executive committee of the Suez Canal Users' Association (October 1956).[75] Reading Butler's Abadan history in April 1962, Frederick Mason, Head of the Foreign Office's Economic Relations Department, pressed the case for a sense of perspective when discussing the 'great shift of power' in the Middle East, since experience of living in post-Abadan Iran – he had returned recently from a four-year posting therein – revealed evidence of growing hostility towards the USA.[76] Paradoxically, the 1956 Suez debacle, albeit often treated as exerting adverse impacts upon British interests, was interpreted by Mason as helping Britain's position in Iran: 'Suez emphasised that our teeth had now been drawn and that the Iranians had nothing more to fear from us.'

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70 Lord Hankey, 'The Suez Canal Company, Military Evacuation of the Zone', 11 February 1953, TNA, PREM 11/636, fols 21–2, 32. For Hankey, a director of the Suez Canal Company, the Egyptians 'are no more competent to run it [the Canal] than the Persians to run Abadan'; Hankey to Lord Salisbury, 7 February 1953, TNA, PREM 11/636, fol. 40.

71 *Hansard*, 15 May 1957, vol. 570, col. 537.

72 Ibid., cols 464, 487–8. See also cols 439–41, 454–5, 467–8, 493, 537. Note Shinwell's use of the Abadan analogy: *Hansard*, 16 May 1957, vol. 570, col. 605.

73 *Hansard*, 15 May 1957, vol. 570, col. 448.

74 Louis, *The British Empire*, p. 689. Attlee agreed: Clement R. Attlee, *As it Happened* (London, 1954), p. 176.

75 Sir Roger Stevens to Lloyd, 18 January 1957, TNA, FO 371/127071/EP1011/1.

76 Frederick Mason, 24 April 1962, TNA, FO 370/2694/LS18/3.

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Chapter 4

Julian Amery and the Suez Operation

Sue Onslow[1]

An enormous amount of literature has appeared on the Suez operation in the past fifty years. This chapter explores two aspects of the crisis which are often relatively neglected: (1) the importance of the British domestic political environment, and (2) the extent to which individual political actors can make a difference through personality, political outlook and position, or their ability to network with other like-minded individuals and institutions. A key member of the Conservative backbench faction the Suez Group – Julian Amery – occupied a unique place at the intersection of the covert dimension to Britain's 'anti-Nasser' policy in 1956 and the overt sphere of party politics that formed a vital backdrop to Sir Anthony Eden's pursuit of Nasser's downfall. Elected as Conservative MP for Preston North in 1950, Amery was also a former intelligence officer from the Second World War who possessed detailed knowledge of Middle Eastern politics. When in March 1956 Eden gave a general mandate to the British intelligence services to pursue Nasser's destruction,[2] Amery's own private network among the Egyptian émigré dissident community and continuing contacts with the British intelligence establishment made him a natural recruit to these clandestine plans.

Amery, a political operator *par excellence*, sought to use all avenues to achieve his political agenda. From his private papers and diary (held at the Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge), the private papers of key parliamentary colleagues,[3] *Hansard* and the British national press, it is evident he pursued covert and overt strategies in tandem. Through his membership of the inner circle of the Suez Group, he sought to shape the climate of political debate in the crucial period prior to Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal Company and during the ensuing Suez crisis. In addition to the Suez Group's role in maintaining domestic political pressure for a robust response to Nasser's challenge to British interests, Amery supported his

1 The argument presented here draws on research presented in the author's book *Conservative Backbench Debate and its Influence on British Foreign Policy 1948–1956* (Basingstoke, 1997), and her 'Unreconstructed Nationalists and a Minor Gunboat Operation: Julian Amery, Neil McLean and the Suez Crisis', *Contemporary British History*, 20/1 (2006): 73–101.

2 Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London, 1991), p. 96.

3 The private papers of Sir John Biggs Davison are held at the House of Lords Records Office; the private papers of Captain Charles Waterhouse are in the possession of his family at Middleton Hall, Middleton, Derbyshire; the papers of Sir Patrick Wall are held at the Archives at the Library of the University of Hull, and the Conservative Party papers are deposited at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

father-in-law Harold Macmillan's ambition to become Prime Minister. Throughout the crisis, Amery also liaised with the French government and politicians, in the hope of establishing an Anglo-French axis in Middle Eastern and European affairs. After the failure of MI6's plan to stimulate a domestic uprising against the Egyptian leader through military action, Amery was thrust back onto the party political approach. But the ultimate irony for Amery's plans for a re-established British presence in the Middle East was that they foundered upon Macmillan's 'deal' with the Eisenhower Administration in late November 1956.

First, the importance of the British domestic scene needs to be examined, to enhance our understanding of the development of the Suez crisis. This was still the world of the 'magic circle' where foreign policy was the preserve of a narrow, overwhelmingly male, political elite, and within this elite different informal groups kept their secrets. Amery had been born into this 'magic circle'. His father had been in Churchill's Cabinet during the Second World War. During the war, Amery had served in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Cairo, supporting the Albanian partisan movement in the Balkans. Once elected to Parliament in 1950, Amery continued to draw on his extensive network of wartime friendships and contacts within the British intelligence services. Amery also had the advantage of being Harold Macmillan's son-in-law. Macmillan had been Eden's first Foreign Secretary in 1955, and was now Chancellor of the Exchequer. Throughout 1956, Macmillan was the principal 'hawk' in the British Cabinet, and has been rightly described as the villain of Suez: 'first in, first out'.[4] He was also a rival to Eden for the premiership, and in 1956, unlike the Prime Minister's political fortunes which were in the doldrums, Macmillan's star was in the ascendance. In 1955, when Macmillan was still Foreign Secretary, Amery had been at the heart of moves to persuade Macmillan of the attractions of a closer relationship with France and Israel. As a keen Europeanist[5] who shared French views of the danger posed by Nasser's brand of radical Arab nationalism, Amery hoped to create a London–Paris axis for co-ordinated policy in the Middle East. He thought that it would be possible to persuade the French government to support the Baghdad Pact, which was designed to limit Soviet encroachment and uphold Britain's position and influence. In 1956, Amery had the opportunity of regular private and lengthy discussions – often heated arguments – with Macmillan on British policy in the Middle East, particularly in the parliamentary summer recess, as his wife (who was expecting twins) were staying at Birchgrove, Macmillan's country home. In August, when Amery was not in France or politicking in London, he could be found in Kent.

Amery was also a key member of the Suez Group. This faction had emerged at the start of the 1950s in response to the first great post-war challenge to British interests in the Middle East: Mossadeq's nationalization of British oil interests at Abadan in Iran.[6] The Suez Group had then attempted to stop British grant of independence to the Sudan, and put up stout resistance to Eden's negotiations for British withdrawal

4 This jibe was famously made by Harold Wilson; David Dutton, *Anthony Eden: A Life and Reputation* (London, 1997), p. 442.

5 Onslow, *Conservative Backbench Debate*, pp. 78–106.

6 See Sue Onslow, '"Battlelines for Suez": The Abadan Crisis of 1951 and the Formation of the Suez Group', *Contemporary British History*, 17/2 (2003): 1–28.

from the Suez Canal Zone base in 1954. The Suez Group in 1953–54 comprised about 40 MPs, with an inner 'hard core' of 28. Its image was of backwoodsmen – a motley collection of colourful, marginal political eccentrics. However, a quarter of them were also members of the Progress Trust – *the* backbench cabal by the mid-1950s, and the preferred forum for discreet backbench pressure upon the Cabinet; furthermore, half were under 50, and a sizeable number had voted against capital punishment. Thus, the Group was much more central to Conservative Party thought and organization than has been appreciated.[7]

Under the October 1954 Anglo-Egyptian Agreement, the last British troops were to be withdrawn from the Canal Zone base in June 1956. Amery (and his fellow Suez Group members) felt that this represented a crucial diminution of British influence in the Middle East, but that it was possible to retrieve the ground lost, and reassert British prestige and presence in the region. In pursuit of this, Amery energetically and ruthlessly exploited the various aspects of his personal, political and intelligence contacts. His freewheeling style makes pretty startling reading. As he himself admitted, 'I learnt much of my politics in the Balkans and the Middle East.'[8] Others described him as 'born with a silver grenade in his mouth'. And Amery was no novice to the world of plots against Middle Eastern leaders: in 1951, he had raised the possibility of the overthrow of Mossadeq with Churchill and Eden and had had private knowledge of the CIA/MI6-sponsored coup in Iran in 1953. In 1952, again he suggested to Eden the possibility of British support of a military coup in Egypt to overthrow the Wafd government and the king. In the summer of 1954, he had been involved in Egyptian dissidents' planning for an anti-Nasser uprising. This had fizzled out with the signature of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement; but the prevailing perception among Amery and his backbench colleagues who took a passionate interest in the Middle East was that Nasser's position was far from secure, and there remained deep-seated divisions and discontent within all levels of Egyptian society which could be exploited to Britain's benefit.

By the beginning of 1956, Amery was following a two-pronged approach. First, the clandestine route: in January, convinced of the dangers of Nasserism and Soviet infiltration in Egypt manifest by the Czech arms deal of September 1955, Amery revived contacts with various exiled Egyptian politicians and dissidents. These included members of the Egyptian royal family, pro-monarchist elements, former Wafd politicians, and King Zog of Albania, now living in Cannes. Zog was a distant relation of the Egyptian royal family who himself had excellent contacts with dissidents in Egypt. The idea was to identify an alternative government to Nasser which would be willing to see a renewed British military presence in the Canal Zone. Secondly, there were his activities, through the Suez Group, to keep up pressure on the Eden government for a robust policy to assert British interests, now under threat in Cyprus and Jordan. The dismissal of the British commander of the Arab Legion at the beginning of March was attributed entirely to Nasser's malign influence. Eden's lamentable performance in the House of Commons in the debate on Glubb's

7 Onslow, *Conservative Backbench Debate*, pp. 6–7, 108–24.

8 Amery MSS, AMEJ 444/1 Amery letter to William Yates, 17 December 1956, Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge.

dismissal on 7 March 1956 stimulated further parliamentary criticism. By the spring, therefore, there was a serious body of Conservative opinion which was increasingly concerned about the Middle East and Eden's leadership.

From March 1956, Amery's clandestine activities increasingly dovetailed with MI6's own wider planning for radical regime change in the Middle East. This was the brainchild of George Young, a former member of SOE and now Deputy Director of MI6. At the end of March, MI6 was given the unofficial sanction from Eden to work for Nasser's downfall – and crucially, Eden bypassed normal channels of the Foreign Office in issuing this instruction. The Foreign Office, for its part, was pursuing Operation Omega with the Americans – the curbing of Nasser (and ideally, engineering his political downfall) through a combination of economic sanctions and political pressure. MI6 had more radical ideas: namely, to promote insurrection and regime change in Damascus, as well as Egypt.[9] Amery's own dissident networks – themselves a complex web of intrigues – had still other ideas.

At the end of March, there was a crucial meeting between George Young and members of the CIA in Washington. As Scott Lucas has shown, at this point Young was remarkably frank with his American counterparts about MI6's broad goals in the Middle East.[10] And it is stretching credulity to argue that Young did not have some degree of official backing in presenting his arguments to the Americans. Amery's cryptic diary entry on 30 March, noting that the Eden government seemed determined to pursue a strong line with Nasser, points to his growing awareness of these plans and increasing collusion with the British intelligence establishment.[11] It must be said that although Amery (and his long-standing friend and fellow Balkan resistance hero, Neil McLean) were unorthodox, both men were insiders – preferring to work with official endorsement, rather than as determined lone operators. Amery's personal diary[12] shows this was through a succession of informal contacts, private meetings at the club and discussions over lunch. Amery's principal contact was his long-standing friend and former SOE colleague in Cairo, Adam Watson. Watson was now head of the Africa Department in MI6, but was also responsible for psychological operations (radio propaganda) against Nasser. By mid-May, Amery and Watson found themselves very much in agreement. In the middle of the month, Amery and McLean again flew to Cannes to confer with King Zog. The plan was now taking shape that a rebel shadow government would assume power after Britain had toppled Nasser through overt or covert means. As he reported to the nominal leader of the Suez Group, Captain Charles Waterhouse, on 14 June 1956, a Wafdist counter-revolution supported by Egyptian dissident officers would look more kindly on Britain:

> Even if a Restoration government ultimately proved a disappointment, a good deal might still have been gained. The Nasser myth would have been broken, a communist coup forestalled and the immediate threat to the Baghdad Pact removed. At best therefore Restoration would seem to offer the chance of getting off to a fresh start in Anglo-Egyptian

9 I am indebted to Professor Scott Lucas for this point.

10 Professor Scott Lucas, *The Archive Hour*, BBC Radio 4, Saturday 28 October 2006.

11 Amery MSS, AMEJ 648, Desk Diary 1956.

12 Ibid.

> relations and at worst a means of paralysing a country which, under its present rulers is a real danger to our vital interests.[13]

In other words, the inner circle of the Suez Group was privy to manoeuvrings to secure Nasser's downfall.

Amery also remained determined to enlist the French. He had discussions with French embassy officials in London immediately after the Glubb Pasha episode in March. Each side agreed on the general formula of mutual support in the Middle East. Also, both should strengthen Israel and take every opportunity to get tough with the Egyptians. In May, Amery was back in Paris, this time talking to Daniel Mayer (Socialist deputy and former Cabinet minister, now president of the National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee). Their topic was the desirability of a Franco-British alliance and British support for France in North Africa. Mayer promised to raise this with Christian Pineau, the French Foreign Minister. But Amery was determined any move against Nasser should be a British initiative, so that London's influence on the successor government in Cairo would be enhanced. Therefore, he discouraged his Egyptian contacts from accepting a French offer to put 'facilities' at their disposal.

By early July, Amery's plotting was acquiring official sanction. Although Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd had not responded to Amery's argument of the need for British troops to remain in the Canal at their meeting in mid-June, at Lloyd's suggestion Amery attended a meeting at the Foreign Office at the end of June. This meeting was attended by Patrick Dean, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, George Young, Watson, and two MI6 field officers – one of whom was the British designated intelligence officer at the British embassy in Cairo. Amery paid another visit to Paris in the third week of July – to bring his Egyptian contacts up to date with planning, to discuss further details of the proposed uprising and to report on Billy McLean's recent tour of the Middle East.[14]

When the nationalization announcement came, Amery's view was 'I told you so.' He was at the forefront of the Suez Group's parliamentary pressure for robust action. Amery was also increasingly personally involved in MI6 planning. At the Foreign Office on 1 August 1956, he met with Douglas Dodds-Parker (Minister of State at the Foreign Office, and himself a former leading member of SOE), Pat Dean, Young and Watson. At this meeting, 'It was agreed we should tell our Egyptian friends there was no longer any substantial difference between the government and ourselves.'[15] Preparations for an insurrection accelerated. Between 3 and 16 August, together with McLean, Amery had further meetings with Egyptian dissidents in Geneva, Cannes and Paris. These included Prince Amr Ibrahim, Prince Namouk (of the Ottoman family), Ahmed al Maraghi (a former Minister of Interior and War in pre-revolution Cabinets, who had only left Cairo in July 1956) and Mahomet Hussein Khairy

13 Captain Charles Waterhouse private papers (Waterhouse MSS), Amery to Waterhouse, 14 June 1956.

14 Although Neil McLean was very much the field officer, he did not speak Arabic. This was to prove an important impediment to gathering accurate information from the necessary disparate sources within Egyptian society.

15 Amery MSS, AMEJ 648, diary entry 1 August 1956.

(another member of the former Egyptian royal family and former army officer) and Mahmoud Aboul Fath. Their contacts now also extended to members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Geneva, the group which had been responsible for attacks on British troops in the Canal Zone, but which had been ruthlessly suppressed in Egypt by Nasser's government. In Paris, Amery and McLean also made contact with MI6 operatives. As Amery reported to George Young on his return to London, there were now two main plans: the dissident civilian and army officer conspirators had plotted the assassination of Nasser and his replacement by the Wafd former Deputy Foreign Minister (Neguib would come out of house arrest and resume the presidency), and the Geneva pro-monarchist contacts wished to see Nasser's overthrow and the restoration of the monarch. To this end, they were in touch with the former intelligence chief of the Egyptian Air Force – who himself wished to engineer an army coup. This meeting strengthened Amery's conviction of the paucity of official British intelligence contacts in Egypt, and Young's consequent enthusiasm to get in touch with Amery's friends.[16]

After a week of talks between Amery, former intelligence officers and active MI6 officers, and Amery's chief Egyptian contact in London, Amery returned to Cannes on 27 August to finalize the planning for the insurrection, and introduced his Egyptian contact to an MI6 officer, the improbably named Captain 'Biffy' Dunderdale.[17] When MI6's own network was arrested by the Egyptian authorities at the beginning of September, Amery found himself in the unique position of the British intelligence services wishing to use his contacts. As he reported to Charles Waterhouse:

> The objective of military operations would be to destroy the Egyptian Army, to bring down the Nasser Government and to control the Suez Canal pending the establishment of machinery for international management and control. The intention was that as soon as the first two objectives had been secured and a successor Government installed, the Allied forces should withdraw to the Canal Zone and act as a garrison pending the establishment of an international canal authority. There were good reasons to believe that, given the defeat of the Egyptian Army and the collapse of the Nasser regime, a successor Government could be formed which would be able to maintain law and order. It was not contemplated that, save in the last resort, the Allied military forces would be called on to assume any responsibility for the central government of Egypt.[18]

This is a remarkable letter for one Conservative backbencher to be writing to another – even in the interesting times of 1956 – showing the extent to which privileged information on the plot to overthrow Nasser was shared within the inner core of the Suez Group.

The third important strand to Amery's activities were the links with the French government. Throughout the Suez crisis, Amery maintained contact with French Prime

16 Amery MSS, AMEJ 648, diary entry 18 August 1956.

17 This was Captain Wilfred Dunderdale, a British intelligence officer in SIS (later MI6) between 1921 and 1959. Born in 1899, Dunderdale was near the end of his career. A long-standing friend of Ian Fleming, it is reputed that the author based his creation, James Bond, upon Dunderdale's personality and career.

18 Waterhouse MSS, Amery to Waterhouse, 3 September 1956.

Minister Guy Mollet's office, Defence Minister Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury, the French embassy in London, as well as other French politicians and journalists. This was particularly important during the Conservative Party Conference in October 1956. Amery was determined to re-inject 'steam' into the issue which seemed to be 'going cold' following the Suez Group's failure to prevent Eden referring the matter to the United Nations in early September after the debacle of Dulles's proposal for a Suez Canal Users' Association. The Conservative Party conference also took place against the background of looming crisis elsewhere in the Middle East, and the increasingly likelihood of war between Israel and Jordan. At Llandudno, Amery liaised with Guy Mollet to maintain pressure on Eden and the British Cabinet for the use of force. As Mollet instructed Amery on the telephone: 'Do your best to keep up the pressure as this may be our last chance to fuel the fire.'[19] Amery needed little encouragement. Together with fellow Suez Group MPs, he successfully engineered a tough amendment to the anodyne resolution in the debate on foreign policy, calling for robust policy in the Middle East. Amery spoke passionately in the subsequent debate:

> If the discussions at the Security Council do not bring Nasser to his senses, then I believe the process of negotiation will be exhausted. Any further compromise would mean surrender. We must go forward with American approval if we can get it; without it if they withhold it; and against their wishes if we must.[20]

The Suez Group's concerted effort at Llandudno was of significant importance in Eden's later decision to use force. While the party conference was proceeding, the Foreign Secretary was negotiating in New York with the Egyptian Foreign Minister; and Selwyn Lloyd, whose own instinct was for a diplomatic solution, was optimistic about the prospect of a negotiated settlement. Eden, who remained convinced in the last resort action would be necessary, was increasingly fearful that Britain's position was being eroded. Egypt appeared confident the crisis was 'burnt out'; therefore, it was imperative that 'we should not be inveigled away in negotiations with the fundamentals to which we have held all along'. Above all, he was insistent that Britain 'should not be parted from the French'.[21] The Prime Minister did nothing to defuse the charged atmosphere at Llandudno. Eden, who had just risen from his sick bed, wound up the conference on 13 October 1956 with a pugnacious speech. To tremendous applause, he promised his government would 'stand firm … I have always said force is the last resort, but it cannot be excluded.'[22] Yet the following morning, the Prime Minister gave Lloyd instructions to accept UN negotiations with Egypt, which was an effective instruction to stand down military preparations. Given his bellicose speech of the previous afternoon, this would have increased his problems with the party in Parliament and the country immeasurably. Later that day, Eden received a deputation from General Challe and acting Foreign Minister Albert Gazier, suggesting a plan of collusion between Israel, France and Britain.

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19 Lord Amery, interview with author.

20 *The Times,* 13 October 1956.

21 TNA, PREM 11/1102, Eden to Selwyn Lloyd telegrams T.440/56, 7 October 1956; T.445/56, 8 October 1956 and 12 October 1956.

22 Eden's speech, reported in *The Times*, 15 October 1956.

The importance of Amery's links with the French government cannot be exaggerated. Preoccupied with the growing Algerian crisis, the French feared Eden would weaken and not seek the desired confrontation with Nasser by no later than the end of October (when the weather in the region would preclude a military assault), leaving France isolated; talking to the Americans was a waste of time as 'they will never authorize any action likely to provoke the fall of Nasser at any rate until after the US presidential elections'.[23] Throughout the crisis, Amery stayed in close touch with the French embassy in London and Mollet's private office. Amery was also aware of the Franco-Israeli contacts, and had maintained his long-standing close contact with the Israeli Ambassador in London.[24] Just before the Llandudno conference, Amery dined with Arthur Grannard and Marcel Boussac, who were close to Mollet. Boussac stressed that the resolution on Suez at Llandudno should be tough, and 'had some interesting ideas' on the line Amery and his colleagues might take.[25]

Therefore, it was a question of a combination of domestic and international pressure on Eden, whose judgement was affected by the strain of overwork, ill-health, and a highly strung temperament.[26] Like the Suez Group, Eden was concerned at the extent of Soviet infiltration in the Middle East, and believed that there was an alternative government to Nasser.[27] And the pressure on Eden for a tough stance was strong – and not only from the Suez Group. This faction had now grown well beyond its original number to approximately a hundred strong (out of a total of 345 Conservative MPs). These new adherents 'did not necessarily respond to some of the Suez Group's vibrations, but felt in terms of defence they were right'.[28] The pressure was also from Mollet and Pineau, from his wife, Clarissa Eden, who kept reminding her husband he was 'wearing the robes of Churchill', and from the pressure of his memories of the First and Second World Wars.[29] Given the domestic misfortunes of his government and criticism of his leadership prior to July 1956,[30] it was inevitable the Prime Minister should be concerned about the reception of his actions on the benches behind him, quite apart from his own hyper-sensitivity to criticism. Eden's leadership of the party was not yet seriously in question, but he would not have been human if he had remained impervious to the rip current of opinion within the party.

However, it was not just the Prime Minister who seems to have been 'hijacked' by the Suez Group and its adherents. The Cabinet were equally susceptible to the prevailing political climate. The rebels' role at the party conference succeeded in re-injecting steam into public debate when the issue was 'going cold'. It demonstrated that the party as a whole would not accept anything that smacked of retreat.

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23 TNA, PREM 11/1102, Eden to Lord Privy Seal T.415/56, 27 September 1956; TNA, PREM 11/1100, Sir Gladwyn Jebb, telegram to Foreign Office no. 295, 9 September 1956.

24 Lord Amery and Arthur Gavshon (Associated Press), interviews with author.

25 Amery MSS, AMEJ 648, diary entry 11 October 1956.

26 Evelyn Shuckburgh interview with Anthony Seldon, British Oral Archive of Political History, BLPES, London School of Economics.

27 Waterhouse MSS, Amery letter to Waterhouse, 14 June 1956. Lucas, *Divided We Stand*, p. 101.

28 Sir David Price, interview with author.

29 Hugh Thomas, *The Sunday Times*, 4 September 1966.

30 This was particularly from the editorial pages of the *Daily Telegraph.*

The Llandudno audience's support of the Suez Group's strident rhetoric from the platform created the fear in the minds of many in the Cabinet that if the government did not act on the brave words uttered by ministers at the conference, these would be shown up as 'rhetorical verbiage'.[31] This was particularly true of the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, who must also bear responsibility for the failure to consult the experienced and very knowledgeable network of British ambassadors in key posts. While many Cabinet members later admitted to their unease over the decision to launch the military operation, few voiced their opposition at the time, and none was prepared to resign on the issue. Their shared belief in the necessity of removing Nasser, Eden's authority in Cabinet and the prevailing political climate effectively stifled their reservations. Indeed, the party conference probably appeared to confer a mandate for military action against Egypt, which the Cabinet had been most reluctant to seek in Parliament.[32]

Amery soon found out through his various sources in Paris 'what was in the wind': namely, collusion between Britain, France and Israel. Mollet himself gave Amery a private assurance before the Israeli attack on Egypt: 'It is going to be alright. We are going ahead, America will be intolerable but if we see it through, not only Britain and France will benefit. If we can win against America and Russia, I will make a good European of your Anthony Eden yet!'[33] This reference to Europe is particularly important. Mollet was intent on welding together an Anglo-French axis in European affairs, to bolster France's negotiating position in the continuing Messina negotiations and to offset an Anglo-Saxon bloc in the NATO framework. Amery himself wished to see a more assertive policy from London *vis-à-vis* Europe and the Americans.

The Suez story from November onwards was the tale of the destruction of Amery's plans. He was jubilant at the news of the Anglo-French ultimatum. At last the Suez Group's policy seemed to be accepted. However, he rapidly became frustrated as the threat of force, then landings at Port Said, failed to trigger the planned uprising against Nasser. The announcement of the cease-fire left him enraged. Pushed back on the political option, Amery worked tirelessly through the Suez Group and in liaison with his contacts in Paris to maintain pressure on the British government to stay in Suez. When it became clear that Macmillan was also prepared to accept British withdrawal, Amery made private soundings of other potential Conservative leaders for a reconstruction of the government; and even contacted the Soviet Embassy in London to see if the Soviets might be prepared to co-operate with the British in the Middle East as a means of excluding American influence. However, Amery's (and MI6's and the Suez Group's) recipe for solving the problem of Nasser's challenge was ultimately defeated by the political machinations of Amery's own father-in-law and political ally, Harold Macmillan. Macmillan had been in contact with the Eisenhower administration, which indicated that while it was insistent on a British

31 Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez* (London, 1978), p. 191.

32 See TNA, PREM 11/1099, Salisbury to Eden, 9 August 1956; TNA, PREM 11/1099, CAB CMCC(56)59, 14 August 1956, and also TNA, PREM 11/1109, Egypt Committee minutes, 9 September 1956.

33 Lord Amery, interview with author.

withdrawal from the Suez Canal Zone, it would look favourably on Macmillan's succession to Eden as Prime Minister.[34]

This is almost a *Boy's Own* bedtime story – very much in the tradition of Kipling and John Buchan. Of course, this was the literature that Amery himself had grown up with, imbued with values of individual enterprise, adventure and patriotism. Amery was thus very much a product of his time, and reflective of the Romanticism of the British public schoolboy of the inter-war period. His wartime experiences had further ingrained these traits. It must also be remembered that Amery's elder brother, John, had been hung for treason in Wandsworth jail in December 1945 – which helps to explain Amery's particularly passionate and energetic patriotism. That said, Amery was extraordinarily fortunate in his network of family, social, political and intelligence connections – all of which he pursued ruthlessly and cultivated effectively. This is not to suggest that Amery was the most important factor in the Suez crisis! However, through an extraordinary set of circumstances, Amery is woven through the Suez affair: through his contribution to MI6's plans for insurrection against Nasser in 1956, and his assistance in the sustained domestic political pressure on Anthony Eden for a robust policy in response to Nasser's challenge, in which the use of force was an integral part. To Amery and his like-minded backbenchers, the use of force was legitimate – niceties of whether it was legal under international law did not concern them. Through this orchestration of domestic opinion, Amery helped to limit the perceived options open to the Cabinet in October 1956, assisting in eroding Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd's disquiet about the Anglo-French-Israeli collusion to instigate a coup, and regime change. The ad hoc Conservative backbench faction, known afterwards as 'the Anti-Suez Group', which comprised many former and practising barristers and supported a negotiated settlement, was a much smaller group. Amery also acted as a source of information for Macmillan, and through the Suez Group, a weapon in the Chancellor's arsenal in Cabinet, and against Eden. Finally, Amery acted as an adjunct to French political pressure for the use of force.

What does this show us about the Suez crisis, beyond being an entertaining tale? This aspect of the Suez crisis reminds us of the need to consider individual actors and their intentions, as well as structures of decision-making, in historians' understanding of past events. As Scott Lucas has pointed out elsewhere, Suez represented the systemic failure of the British system in the planning and execution of British policy in the Suez crisis.[35] This went beyond the question of division between narrow political decisions, and military planning. There is the aspect of Eden's behaviour – and ability to circumvent established policy channels within the political/bureaucratic framework. There is also the issue of MI6's own interdepartmental in-fighting: there were continued frictions between former SOE members and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) – which dated back over a decade and a half. To a degree, MI6 appears to be a rogue elephant in 1956. The intelligence service itself was not a closely co-ordinated department. It would appear that Dick White, head of MI6, had lost control

34 Professor Scott Lucas, 'Les Occidentaux et la crise de Suez. Une relecture politico-militaire', Ecole Militaire, Paris, 16–18 November 2006.

35 Ibid.

of his section, as his deputy, George Young, was pursuing a particular agenda. And Amery himself was to a degree deluded by Young about the extent to which MI6 (as SOE reincarnate) could influence and direct events. In reality, MI6 had changed from the wartime era of SOE enterprise, and Amery failed to appreciate this.[36]

As Amery's plan came to be 'the only game in town' by early September 1956, what is particularly striking in these post-2003 days is the lack of 'exit strategy' planning. In 1956, through a particular set of circumstances, Amery contributed to the plan to secure Nasser's overthrow, with the idea of a restoration government. It must be said that Amery's plan went beyond this to the acceptance of a renewed British presence at the Canal Zone base, which was not the British government's intention. However, too many variables were not addressed in the decision to collude with the French and Israelis. It presupposed that the new Government in Cairo would be pro-British and able to prevent hostile popular reaction.

This raises the question of why these variables were not addressed. Amery represents the mindset prevailing within the British political establishment at the time: a mindset shaped by the earlier great crisis for British interests in the Middle East, the Abadan affair of 1950–51, which 'hung like a black cloud' over contemporary actors;[37] a mindset of residual British strength, together with disdain for Egyptians as soldiers dating back to the Second World War; a perceived window of opportunity before the Soviet presence was more firmly established in Egypt, with associated weaponry and training; a belief in the fragility of Nasser's hold on power, and a fundamental misunderstanding of the forces and dynamics of Egyptian nationalism. From the standpoint of today, the tale of Amery and his adventures is illustrative of the extent to which British policy, planning and execution in 1956 was prone to wishful thinking. However, Amery was a man of his time, and within the spectrum of 'normal' and 'rational' in 1956 – rather than being a peculiar aberrant. The events of 1956 are thus a classic case study of the dangers of imperfect and partial intelligence being used to justify policy, rather than inform policy-makers.

36 Professor Clive Jones, 'Reassessing Suez Fifty Years On', University of Hull, 25–26 July 2006.

37 John Baldock interview with author, quoted in Onslow, 'Battlelines for Suez', p. 22.

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Chapter 5

Who to Fight in 1956, Egypt or Israel? Operation Musketeer versus Operation Cordage

Eric Grove

As General Keightley put it in his despatch on Operation Musketeer, the attack on Egypt in 1956, the actual target of the British operation that year had been something of a surprise. 'In my capacity as C-in-C Middle East Land Forces,' he wrote, 'I had already been engaged in planning for possible operations in the area but mainly in the event of Britain being involved as a result of her commitments through the Anglo-Jordanian Alliance.'[1] For most of 1955–56, the most likely British intervention did indeed look like being in support of their ally Jordan against their secret Suez associate, Israel. Only at the last minute was a new choice of enemy made. In this context, it was hardly surprising that the Israelis were so suspicious of the British. They had every reason to be. If the Israelis had pressed their actions against Jordan much further in 1956, the British aircraft that bombed Egypt might instead have been unleashed on Israeli airfields. British warships might have bombarded and blockaded the Jewish state, not Colonel Nasser's. This chapter will examine the origins of the British plan for military action against Israel, the development of that plan, code-named Operation Cordage, and the circumstances in which it was, very much at the last minute, abandoned in favour of military action against Egypt, in secret and ironic collusion with Britain's previously planned opponent. It will show how British action against Israel was regarded as a very real prospect, and how British commanders viewed action against Israel as a possibility, even after the initiation of Musketeer. This gives a new perspective to Britain's attempted 'cover story' of attempting to be seen as an even-handed 'peacekeeper' in the Middle East. It was not that implausible, even within the armed forces, that Britain might take military action against both sides in the Arab–Israeli confrontation. Equally, the story of Cordage demonstrates Britain's curious desire to try to 'have it both ways' in the region, a policy that was bound to do much to alienate, if not exasperate, all Britain's friends, new as well as old.

Britain had signed a defensive treaty with Jordan in 1948, and had landed a battle group at Aqaba the following year. British Venom fighter bombers were based at Amman after being moved from the Canal Zone in 1954. Another British airfield, at Mafraq, was seen as useful for the planned V-bomber force. There was also a

1 TNA, DEFE 11/137.

large ordnance depot at Zerka. The situation along the West Bank cease-fire line had begun to deteriorate in 1953 with the Qibya raid. Seven lesser operations were carried out in 1954, and in October the British began to plan how they would fulfil their commitments to Jordan should the situation get out of hand. By the middle of 1955, a deployment plan was in being coded JOI (Joint Operation Instruction) 27, and it was subjected to review at three-monthly intervals. By September 1955, the whole operation had acquired its first name, Operation Catapult.[2] The plan was approved by the Cabinet Defence Committee in November 1955, at which point it probably acquired its definitive name, Operation Cordage.

In January 1956, the Chiefs of Staff reviewed the deployment plans for 'Assistance to Jordan in the event of Israeli Aggression'.[3] Interestingly, the report under consideration assumed that British assistance would be in the context of an Arab–Israeli war begun by an Israeli attack on Egypt which Jordan would have been put under pressure to help. Immediate action was essential if Jordan was to be 'saved and not merely resuscitated'. The plan included an air campaign carried out by Venoms based at Amman and Mafraq in Jordan to knock out the Israeli Air Force in 72 hours. Carrier air power would add its weight to this assault. A fighter wing of swept-wing aircraft (Sabres or Hunters) would be provided from Germany to operate from Cyprus, and two squadrons of Canberra light bombers would also operate from Nicosia. The independent parachute brigade group was to be flown from Cyprus and the UK into Mafraq in Shackleton maritime reconnaissance aircraft and Hastings transports. Valetta transports were also to be deployed to Cyprus, as was an extra infantry brigade group to replace an infantry brigade group already there that was to be flown to Jordan. The overall deployment to Jordan was Operation Encounter, the moves from the UK, Operation Brimstone.

At the end of January 1956, the Chiefs re-examined how British forces might be used. The paper was entitled 'Limited War in Support of Jordan Against Israel', and its objective was the restoration of the status quo along the cease-fire lines.[4] The main weapon would be blockade, to which, it was assessed, Israel was especially vulnerable. It was also expected that the Israelis would conquer the West Bank in two to three weeks. The British operations would be as follows:

- **Sea** – carrier air operations against ground targets (intensive for three days, sustained for up to two weeks); shore gunnery bombardment of targets including military installations, power stations and civil airfields on the Mediterranean coast and Gulf of Aqaba; blockade operations (supported by maritime reconnaissance aircraft); landing of Royal Marine Commandos (the First Sea Lord had suggested moving them through the Suez Canal to Aqaba); engaging any Israeli surface forces that might appear;
- **Air** – intensive operations by five Venom fighter/ground attack squadrons against the Israeli air and ground forces; Canberra attacks against Israeli airfields for up to two weeks followed by operations as required against

2 TNA, DEFE 11/129.
3 COS (56) 9, TNA, DEFE 5/64.
4 COS (56) 39, ibid.

ground forces; intensive operations against the Israeli Air Force (IAF) by the two swept-wing fighter squadrons;

- **Land** – intensive holding operations by the flown-in forces, the parachute brigade group and infantry brigade together with the deployed armoured regiment, firstly to defend the British airfields and ordnance depot and British lives and property, then, in conjunction with the Arab Legion, to defend Amman; operations in the south to secure Aqaba and capture Eilath.

It was expected that the combination of air attacks and blockade would cause Israel to disgorge the West Bank within about six months.

At the end of February, the dismissal of General Glubb, the commander of Jordan's Arab Legion under whose command the British ground forces were to operate, created problems.[5] Operation Cordage's planning was predicated on British officers in charge of Jordanian forces. A revised Operation Cordage was proposed by the British Defence Co-ordination Committee (Middle East) in April. The Chiefs of Staff considered the question the following month, and agreed that the focus of the air operation should be shifted to Cyprus, with the Amman Venoms operating as long as possible.[6] Neutralization of the IAF might be delayed as a result. British troops would still be flown in if possible, but the emphasis was now more on the protection of British lives and property. Support might eventually be offered to Jordanian land operations, but not under any kind of integrated command, Jordanian or British. Eilath would still be captured. This revised plan was adopted by the Defence Committee of the Cabinet.[7]

In the summer of 1956, the Jordanians made it clear that they did not want British ground forces landed in northern Jordan because of the political implications for the regime.[8] Their preference was for Iraqi help on the ground. Nevertheless, they were keen to continue Operation Cordage's other naval and air aspects and the attack on Eilath.

By September 1956, Operation Musketeer planning was in full swing, and just before the end of the month the British Joint Planners produced for the Chiefs of Staff a paper on 'Implications of Israeli Aggression in Connection with Operation Musketeer'.[9] Interestingly, the Planners saw Israeli exploitation of the Anglo-French crisis with Egypt as more a problem than an asset. Although Israeli operations against Egypt would clearly help Operation Musketeer:

> … our apparent association with Israel could possibly lead to the disintegration of the Baghdad Pact, the loss of our position in Jordan and Iraq and to a requirement to reinforce the Persian Gulf. It is therefore most important that we should avoid the appearance of any collusion with the Israelis.

5 DC (56) 10, TNA, CAB 131/17.
6 COS (56) 163, TNA, DEFE 5/67.
7 DC (56) 5th Meeting, TNA, CAB 131/17.
8 COS (56) 249, TNA, DEFE 5/69.
9 JP (56) 139, TNA, DEFE 6/37.

Although Operation Musketeer would make the position of the British forces in Jordan problematic, as long as the treaty was in force the British would still be in a position to give 'limited assistance' to the Jordanians.

If Israel attacked Jordan before an Anglo-French invasion of Egypt:

> strong and effective air attack and subsequently naval blockade could be applied against Israel although any consequent postponement of Operation Musketeer would have to be accepted. In making the decision regarding the action to be taken, we should have to consider, apart from our Treaty obligations, the long term implications of, on the one hand taking decisive military action against Israel or, on the other hand, maintaining the potential British, and incidentally Israeli, threat to Egypt.

If Israel attacked in the early stages of Operation Musketeer, 'decisive military action could only be taken by diverting substantial air effort from the operation, thereby failing to maintain our primary aim against Egypt'. It was suggested that blockade and the Aqaba operation 'could be undertaken as a sign of support for the Arab states and our non complicity with Israel'. If Israel intervened in the later stages of Operation Musketeer, 'we might well be able to take more effective action against her', its 'scale and nature' to be addressed at the time.

When the Chiefs of Staff discussed the question on 10 October, Sir Gerald Templer, Chief of the General Staff, said it should be made clear to ministers that Britain could go to the aid of Jordan against Israel or attack Egypt, but not both.[10] Once Operation Musketeer was launched, Britain could do nothing against Israeli attempts to exploit the situation. Sir William Dickson, the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, said that Israel had the capacity to interfere seriously with Operation Musketeer, hence any assurances to Jordan should not go into details

These discussions were taking place in the context of a deteriorating situation on the West Bank. Border raids at Rahwah and Gharandal had led King Hussein in mid-September to go to Iraq to obtain military support. This had full British support. Further incidents led to more Israeli retaliation being carried out, culminating in the big Qalqilya action on the night of 10–11 October.[11] King Hussein duly called for assistance, and early in the morning the British Consul General in Jerusalem called the Israeli Governor with the threat that if the attack was not called off immediately, there was a serious danger of an Anglo-Israeli war. Later that day, Hussein asked for all help possible. Flights of Hunters from Cyprus were organized to show British commitment, although the Jordanian monarch was told that such forces could not be deployed because of the prospect of Operation Musketeer. When deployment of Iraqi forces (at British request) looked imminent, Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir's adverse reaction led the British Chargé d'Affaires in Tel Aviv to make it clear that any military action to prevent it would bring the Anglo-Jordanian alliance

10 COS (56) 102nd Meeting, TNA, DEFE 4/91.

11 For a good discussion of this raid, its motivation and its connection with the wider Suez crisis, see W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1991), pp. 230–36. Lucas argues that Qalqilya was 'the catalyst for the tripartite attack on Egypt. It gave the French the opportunity to renew the pressure on the British and Eden … to embark on a new effort for the overthrow of Nasser.'

into play. When asked if this meant Israeli action would lead to British bombing attacks, the answer was a laconic 'yes'.[12]

Things were moving the opposite way in London, however. Even before the famous meeting of Eden, Albert Gazier, the acting French foreign minister, and General Challe at Chequers on Sunday 14 October, Eden had angrily told Anthony Nutting that 'he would not allow you to plunge this country into war merely to satisfy the anti-Jewish spleen of you people in the Foreign Office'.[13] At Chequers, the first plans for Anglo-French-Israeli collusion were laid. The extent of the Anglo-French problems that would be created by Cordage was also made clear. Eden told Gazier and Challe that he would request the Iraqis to suspend the deployment of troops to Jordan.[14] The very same day, the British Ambassador in Amman, who was trying to obtain swift and effective British intervention in the case of another Qalqilya, was firmly told that no practical British land or air measures could save Jordan, and that retaliatory attacks against British bases in Cyprus 'would be highly inconvenient at the present juncture', given the military build-up there. Reassurances of a general nature were, however, given to the king.[15]

On 16 October, Shimon Peres wrote in his diary of Ben-Gurion's 'deep mistrust' of the British.[16] He would have been confirmed in this mistrust if he had read a paper produced by the British Joint Planners the following day.[17] This was an answer to the British Middle Eastern Command, who had asked what was practical to do to help Jordan if attacked by Israel. It was thought that the only action practical was to inflict attrition on the IAF so that it would stop before it became too weak against its Arab enemies. Little could be done to stop Jordan being overrun by a determined attack. It was not proposed to withdraw the French forces to accommodate additional Venoms for use against Israel in case Operation Musketeer was required at short notice. The risk of Israeli attack on French forces was to be taken. The Chiefs recommended that the air forces earmarked for Operation Musketeer should be brought up to strength to deter Israel and that Aqaba should be reinforced. The carriers should be kept at short notice.

A signal was drafted to the British command that if operations against Israel were ordered, they were to take priority over Operation Musketeer, which would be delayed accordingly. The Chiefs of Staff were, however, advising ministers that once Operation Musketeer was launched, all hostilities against Israel should be avoided until Egypt had capitulated and maximum air effort could be disposed against Israel.

Planning was to be based on:

1. air operations of maximum intensity against Israel;
2. blockade and naval bombardment as soon as the air situation permitted;
3. operations against Eilath necessary to secure Aqaba.

12 Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London, 2003), p. 294.
13 Ibid., p. 296.
14 Lucas, *Divided We Stand*, p. 236.
15 Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 294–5.
16 Ibid., p. 314.
17 JP 56 Note 9, TNA, DEFE 6/37.

To carry these out, British commanders could expect the RAF Operation Musketeer air strike force, including forces based at Malta, the three carriers *Eagle*, *Bulwark* and *Albion*, other naval forces from the Mediterranean Fleet and 'O' Force at Aqaba reinforced as necessary. The Chiefs were 'putting to Ministers the military desirability of not taking action' until reinforcements arrived, but there was 'a strong likelihood that it may be politically essential for us to intervene immediately should there be a full scale Israeli attack on Jordan'. Ministers were therefore being asked to send the extra aircraft as soon as possible. This message was approved by the Chiefs the following day, it being made clear that no preliminary action should take place that would impair Operation Musketeer and that the risk of not reinforcing the forces at Aqaba be taken.[18]

That very day, the British Cabinet met to discuss operations against Egypt, not Israel. Nevertheless, from the Admiralty, at the insistence of Vice Admiral Davis, the Vice Chief of Naval Staff (VCNS), a signal was sent to the Mediterranean Fleet to bring Operation Cordage forces to 72 hours' notice by the middle of the following week. Cryptically, First Sea Lord Mountbatten, who, unlike VCNS, was in the know about the trend of events, added a dark sentence on the 'extremely serious view which we now take of likelihood of having to intervene in Arab/Israeli conflict'. The following day, Mountbatten followed this up with a personal signal to Grantham, the C-in-C, that Operation Musketeer was being held in readiness 'over and above Cordage plans'. Grantham, however, still thought options were open. On 20 October, he expressed his desire for Operation Musketeer commanders to come out early to Malta to keep them clear of Cyprus, where the HQ might be simultaneously involved in Operation Cordage. If Operation Musketeer was to be ordered shortly after Operation Cordage, the carrier effort would have to be withdrawn immediately after the neutralization of the IAF.[19] The C-in-C Middle East Air Forces was equally in the dark as to which operation was to be carried out by his reinforced squadrons.[20]

Operation Cordage would soon effectively be dead, although no one planning to execute it knew as yet. It was a casualty of the Sèvres meeting. In Article 5 of the resulting protocol, the Israelis promised not to attack Jordan during the period of operations against Egypt. The British promised in turn not to come to the aid of Jordan if it attacked Israel.[21] Within a couple of days, British commanders were informed in person that Operation Cordage was to be stood down and Operation Musketeer put into operation. But Operation Cordage would still not lie down, so central had it been to British military planning in 1956. Even after Operation Musketeer had been initiated, some British commanders, notably the ever open-minded Admiral Grantham, remained fearful of too close or obvious an association with the Israelis, 'especially if we are to carry out a modified Cordage as may well be

18 TNA, DEFE 4/91.

19 First Sea Lord's Files, TNA, ADM 205/13.

20 TNA, AIR 20/9965.

21 See copy of the protocol that is an appendix to Avi Shlaim, 'The Protocol of Sevres 1956: Anatomy of a War Plot', in David Tal (ed.), *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East* (London, 2001), p. 141.

necessary once Anglo/French forces are established in the Canal Zone'.[22] Clearly, he still did not rule out military action against Israel, presumably if required to coerce the Israelis out of Sinai and the Gaza Strip. By the time he wrote this, a new JOI 27 (Second Revise) had been issued, on 30 October 1956.[23]

Operation Cordage, however modified, did not have long to last in the new, transformed post-Suez context. In early 1957, the plan was formally abandoned, a fate shared shortly afterwards by the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty itself. Cordage was soon forgotten in the fuss about 'Suez', only being brought back into the public domain by Keith Kyle and Scott Lucas in their books, both first published in 1991.[24] Even since then, the Operation Cordage plans and their ironies have still tended to be ignored. Yet, without appreciating the full duality and contradictions of British policy in 1956, it is impossible to grasp all the dimensions of the Suez affair as a whole.

22 C-in-C Mediterranean to Admiralty, 4 November 1956, TNA, ADM 205/140.

23 I have not been able to locate this. Certain documents about this potentially embarrassing subject do seem to be missing from the National Archives.

24 See notes 11 and 12 above. Keith Kyle's book was originally published in London that year.

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Chapter 6

French–Israeli Relations, 1950–1956: The Strategic Dimension

Zach Levey

This chapter examines four principal elements in the strategic dimension of French–Israeli relations from 1950 to 1956.[1] First, mutual hostility toward Egypt and France's deteriorating position in Algeria laid the groundwork for French–Israeli military co-operation in October–November 1956. Second, domestic political developments in both countries were a major factor in the 1956 confluence of strategic interests. Third, arms became the principal 'currency' in the relationship, and in 1956 France for the first time sold Israel large quantities of military hardware. Yet this work explores a fourth element – the great circumspection with which the Israelis regarded France even as that country became their principal source of modern aircraft. In truth, Israeli policymakers never considered France a long-term alternative to the strategic relationship with the United States that they hoped eventually to achieve.[2] Archival sources reveal that Israeli policymakers spared no effort to obtain French arms, but considered France's regional policies ultimately incompatible with their own. Israel's Prime Minister and Defence Minister, David Ben-Gurion, saw danger in over-reliance on France, which in his view pursued its own narrow interests in the Middle East.[3]

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1 The main secondary sources on French–Israeli relations are Mordechai Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza* (Tel Aviv, 1992) (in Hebrew); Michael Bar-Zohar, *Bridge Over the Mediterranean: French–Israeli Relations, 1947–1963* (Tel Aviv, 1965) (in Hebrew); Sylvie Crosbie, *A Tacit Alliance: France and Israel from Suez to the Six Day War* (Princeton, NJ, 1974); Motti Golani, *Israel in Search of a War: The Sinai Campaign 1955–1956*, (Brighton, 1998); Benjamin Pinkus, *From Ambivalence to a Tacit Alliance: Israel, France and French Jewry 1947–1957* (Sde Boker, 2005) (in Hebrew); Abel Thomas, *Comment Israël fut sauvé*: *les secrets de l'expedition de Suez* (Paris, 1978). The present work is adapted from and partly based on a chapter that appeared in Zach Levey, *Israel and the Western Powers, 1952–1960* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).

2 Meeting, Foreign Affairs Committee of Mapai, 7 May 1957, Israeli Labour Party Archives (LPA), Bet Berl, Israel.

3 Ben-Gurion's diary, 10 March 1957, BGA.

The Quai d'Orsay and the Israeli Foreign Ministry: Relations in the Early 1950s

France supplied Israel with arms during the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, selling the Jewish state Sherman tanks, artillery pieces and Spitfire planes on a 'cash and carry' basis. These transfers notwithstanding, from 1952 the French Foreign Ministry (Quai d'Orsay) placed strict limits on arms to Israel, so as not to damage France's relations with the Arab states. On the diplomatic plane, France accorded Israel de jure recognition only on 21 May 1949, more than one year after its establishment.[4] A major reason for the long delay was the opposition to recognition of the Jewish state of the French colonial authorities, which deferred to Muslim sensitivity on the issue. When France extended de jure recognition, it noted that the Arab states had by then tacitly, if indirectly, recognized Israel's existence by signing armistice agreements.[5]

At the beginning of the 1950s, France's interests in the Middle East were a steady supply of oil from the region, protection of its lines of communication to Indochina, and the maintenance of security and stability in its colonial possessions in North Africa. French officials in both Paris and Algiers considered their country a 'Muslim power', and that view dictated cool relations with Israel. Moshe Sharett, Israel's Foreign Minister, described France's attitude towards Israel as 'cold and calculating'.[6] Benjamin Pinkus notes that during the same period, Israeli officials themselves related to French diplomats in a stiff and reserved manner, reflecting the primacy that they accorded the United States and Britain in their country's foreign relations.[7] Sylvie Crosbie claims that Israeli–French relations suffered because of the 'predilections of Israel's timorous and tradition-bound Foreign Ministry', and she attributes to Israel's diplomatic corps an 'Anglo-Saxon orientation' that militated against warmer ties with France.[8]

In truth, Crosbie's description of the Israeli Foreign Ministry is both inaccurate and unfair. The Israeli Foreign and Defence Ministries diverged sharply over the approach to be taken in relations with France, but never differed over the importance of procuring arms from any possible source. The urgency of obtaining arms led Israel to seek ways to circumvent obstacles to arms transactions that the Quai d'Orsay created, and the bureaucratic infighting of the French Fourth Republic eventually made that possible. Israeli defence officials cultivated close ties with pro-Israeli members of the French defence establishment who opposed the Quai d'Orsay's Middle East policies, and this 'unorthodox diplomacy' brought about the large-scale weapons transfers of 1956. At the same time, the Israeli Foreign Ministry consistently reported the warnings of senior officials of the Quai d'Orsay that a French backlash against a pro-Israel policy was inevitable, and Israel's diplomats were outspoken in their view that reliance on France was hazardous. Yet Ben-Gurion, too, knew

4 'Israel and France: The Beginning of Relations', *State, Government and International Relations*, A, no. 2 (1971) (in Hebrew).

5 Bar-Zohar, *Bridge Over the Mediterranean*, pp. 32, 34.

6 Ibid., p. 25.

7 Pinkus, *From Ambivalence to Tacit Alliance*, pp. 356–7.

8 Crosbie, *Tacit Alliance*, p. 3.

that diplomacy based on thwarting the Quai d'Orsay was a temporary state of affairs, and realized that it would undermine Israel's long-term relationship with the French foreign policy establishment. He expected a rapid reversion of French policy following the Suez–Sinai war to a pro-Arab stance, and expressed grave concern over the fact that France was Israel's sole source of arms.[9]

In Israel's view, France was no longer a regional power, but a 'broken reed', its claim to be a partner in Western defence of the Middle East tenuous.[10] In 1952, the United States and Britain consulted France on the proposed Middle East Defence Organization, but excluded it from their consultations with regard to defence of the Northern Tier. France's exclusion from that planning heightened the consistent Israeli perception of France throughout the period covered here. Moreover, the Israeli Foreign Ministry warned that France's interest in Syria, with which Israel had clashed on repeated occasions, could bring Israel into confrontation with both the Quai d'Orsay and the French defence establishment. Yet at the same time, in the Israeli assessment, even France's influence in Syria was circumscribed.[11] In early 1955, Shmuel Ben-Dor, counsellor at the Israeli embassy in Paris, wrote that it was incumbent upon Israel to proceed with 'an awareness of France's limitations … the United States and Britain are the masters of this region'.[12]

France's Middle East Arms Policy

France was a signatory to the Tripartite Declaration of May 1950, and that accorded it, at least formally, a status in the Middle East equal to that of the United States and Britain.[13] But US Secretary of State Dean Acheson and British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin included France mainly because they wished to 'plug the loophole' of French arms supplies to Syria.[14] France was less concerned than the United States and Britain about the regional consequences of renewed conflict between Israel and the Arab states, anxious to break into the predominantly British arms market, and for these reasons inclined to interpret much more loosely the limitations that the Tripartite Declaration prescribed.[15]

The Tripartite Declaration did not reduce French arms transfers to Syria, and France refused to disclose to the United States and Britain the scope of its arms

9 Mapai Central Committee, 3 January 1957, LPA.

10 Avner to Ben-Dor, 18 February 1955, Israel State Archives (ISA) 192/41.

11 Divon to Najar, 23 August 1953; Divon to Western Europe Section, 28 August 1953, ISA 177/7.

12 Ben-Dor to Tsur, 10 February 1955, ISA 192/41.

13 See Shlomo Slonim, 'Origins of the 1950 Tripartite Declaration on the Middle East', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 23/2 (1987): 135–49.

14 Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951* (Oxford, 1984), p. 585.

15 Paul Jabber, *Not by War Alone: Security and Arms Control in the Middle East* (Los Angeles, CA, 1981), p. 97.

sales to Damascus.[16] In late 1951, the British embassy reported that 'all we know is that French arms are pouring into Syria'.[17] France justified weapons transfers to Damascus by claiming that the Syrians 'of course needed arms. They had to defend themselves against the Jews. Few understood as well as the Syrians what aggressive intentions the Israelis harboured, and the French thought it only fair not to deny the Syrian army the means to defend itself should the necessity arise'.[18]

In December 1953, the British military attaché in Damascus obtained a detailed list of French weapons sales to the Shishakli regime between 1949 and 1952. According to this document, France's estimate of its total arms sales to Syria during these years was 10 billion francs (about $2.8 million), making France Syria's main arms supplier at this time.[19] During the same period, Damascus's second largest supplier, the United States, sold Syria arms worth less than $450,000.[20] The main item France sold Syria during this period, over American and British objections, was a consignment of 52 Sherman tanks.[21]

France's desire for a larger share of the Middle East arms market led it to sell arms to Israel notwithstanding its support of Syria. Thus, in 1950 France sold Israel 60 Mosquito bombers (vintage 1941), and in 1951, despite the objections of the United States and Britain, 100 Sherman tanks.[22] At the end of 1952, France lost its dominance of the Syrian arms market when Britain sold Syria Meteor jets. In June 1952, the French defence establishment, eager to promote arms sales in order to bolster France's military industries, had signed a contract with Israel for the sale of three Nord-2500 transport planes and 25 Ouragan jet fighters.[23] According to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, officials of the Africa and Levant Department of the Quai d'Orsay were responsible for blocking the sale, because they did not want to prejudice the remaining French influence in Syria.[24]

Israel hoped the French Defence Ministry would overcome the Quai d'Orsay's opposition, so that Israel would be able to purchase the more advanced Mystère-2 jet.[25] But when in October 1952 Britain decided to sell 14 jets each to Egypt, Iraq, Syria,

16 Embassy in Beirut to Embassy in Washington, 15 July 1952, TNA, FO 371/98283 E1194/46.

17 Embassy in Damascus to Foreign Office, 20 November 1951, TNA, FO 371/91229 E1192/339.

18 Chapman-Andrews to Furlonge, 14 August 1951, TNA, FO 371/91188 E1027/11.

19 Embassy in Damascus to Foreign Office, 15 December 1953, TNA, FO 371/104230 E1192/406.

20 Rough estimate based on quarterly reports of US arms sales to the Middle East in TNA, FO 371/91232 E1193.

21 Embassy in Washington to Foreign Office, 18 September 1951, TNA, FO 371/91233 E1193/29; Embassy in Damascus to Foreign Office, 15 December 1953, FO 371/104230 E1192/406.

22 Jabber, *Not by War Alone*, p. 112; *The Arms Trade Registers*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (Cambridge, MA, 1975), p. 55.

23 Crosbie, *Tacit Alliance*, pp. 41–3.

24 Najar to Divon, 19 July 1953, ISA 177/7.

25 Yitzhak Steigman, *History of the Air Force: The Air Force from 1950 to 1956* (Tel Aviv, 1986) (in Hebrew), pp. 52–4.

Lebanon and Israel, the Israelis felt constrained to purchase the obsolete Meteors Britain offered.[26] The French, meanwhile, protested that Britain had agreed that Syria and Lebanon were to be France's clients, and claimed that they had made no effort to impinge upon Britain's lucrative Egyptian market.[27] France's attempt to prevent British domination of the Syrian and Lebanese aircraft markets by offering those countries Ouragan jets failed, and in fact, by early 1953 Syria had also requested of the United Kingdom Centurion tanks and Daimler armoured cars.[28] The French Foreign Ministry continued throughout 1953 to persuade Damascus to buy French rather than British jets, and used the framework of the Near East Arms Coordinating Committee (established by the Tripartite Declaration) to protest (unsuccessfully) Britain's plan to sell Syria an additional 12 Meteor jets.[29]

The rise in tension on the Israeli–Jordanian border made it less likely that Britain would consent to sell Israel Centurion tanks and other types of weapons for which the Israelis had applied in London.[30] For that reason, Israel approached France in late 1952 with a request to buy 30 AMX-13 light tanks, 26 155mm howitzers, and 20 75mm guns.[31] At the same time, France's loss of the Syrian arms market apparently lent greater force to the arguments of the French Defence Ministry's arguments in favour of selling arms to Israel. Thus, in June 1953 France requested Near East Arms Coordinating Committee (NEACC) authorization for the sale of 26 155mm howitzers to Israel.[32]

The United States objected to this proposed sale on the grounds that it would tilt the Middle East arms balance in Israel's favour,[33] and the Quai d'Orsay used those objections as an excuse to withhold arms. But at the same meeting, the French representative admitted that 'someone in the French Ministry of Defence' had already committed France to the sale of 26 155mm guns to Israel.[34] The Israelis had secured a contract for the howitzers through the personal intervention of Deputy Prime Minister Paul Reynaud.[35] Indeed, Pierre Gilbert, France's openly pro-Israel ambassador in Tel Aviv, actively encouraged the Israeli Defence Ministry to pursue closer ties with its French counterpart and with individuals in the French government sympathetic to Israel.[36]

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26 Sharett's memo of 22 October 1952, ISA 42/13A.

27 British Middle East Office (BMEO) weekly political summary no. 49, 10 December 1953, TNA, FO 371/104188 E1013/51.

28 BMEO weekly political summary no. 22, 4 June 1953, TNA, FO 371/104187 E1013/22; Embassy in Damascus to Foreign Office, 15 December 1953, TNA, FO 371/104230 E1192/406.

29 Embassy in Paris to Foreign Office, 4 December 1953, TNA, FO 371/104229 E1192/36.

30 Divon to Western Europe Section, 10 July 1953, ISA 177/7; Embassy in Paris to Foreign Office, 7 October 1952, TNA, FO 371/98285 E1194/77.

31 Bar-Zohar, *Bridge over the Mediterranean*, p. 59.

32 Embassy in Paris to Foreign Office, 6 October 1953, TNA, FO 371/104226 1192/300.

33 Divon to Najar, 23 August 1953, ISA 177/7.

34 British Embassy in Washington to Foreign Office, 9 September 1953, TNA, FO 371/104225 E1192/263.

35 Bar-Zohar, *Bridge over the Mediterranean*, p. 59.

36 Crosbie, *Tacit Alliance*, p. 44.

Israel's Qibya Raid and French–Israeli Relations

Israel's retaliatory raid on the Jordanian (West Bank) village of Qibya on 14 October 1953, in which 69 innocent civilians were killed, obviated Israeli progress towards obtaining AMX tanks. Ya'akov Tsur, the Israeli Ambassador to France, brought up the subject of the tanks in a meeting in early November with Alexandre Parodi, Secretary-General of the French Foreign Ministry. Parodi replied that Israel should not expect a prize for the Qibya operation.[37] France viewed the raid as an ominous portent for Israeli–Syrian relations. The Quai d'Orsay was in principle willing to have Israel deploy AMX tanks in the Negev, but did not want them 'climbing the Syrian heights'.[38] Gilbert, the French Ambassador, also expressed concern lest Israel do damage to France's interests in Syria or undermine the regime in Damascus.[39] In a lecture in Israel on French foreign policy on 20 December 1953, Gilbert acknowledged that France had attempted to convince the Syrians to reach accommodation with Israel, but failed. Nevertheless, warned Gilbert, France was unwilling to countenance an 'Israel on the warpath'.[40] As we will observe, Israel's conflict with Syria would come between Israel and France in late 1955, when Israel already had a French commitment to sell a large quantity of arms.

Accord over Algeria, Discord over Syria

Gilbert pointed to the 'natural connection' between the rebellion against France in Algeria and Israel's deepening conflict with Egypt, which was aiding the Algerian rebels. The French Ambassador helped Shimon Peres, Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Defence, to arrange an unofficial visit to France in early August 1954 for the Israeli Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan. Gilbert entertained notions about a joint French–Israeli front against Nasser, and viewed this as the main purpose of Dayan's visit.[41] In fact, Dayan had in mind contacts that would advance arms procurement; in his view, sharing intelligence with France on the matter of Algeria was a French, not an Israeli interest.[42] Nevertheless, Dayan instructed Yehoshafat Harkabi, deputy chief of Israel's military intelligence, to meet with Robert Lacoste, a top official in the French colonial government (who in February 1956 became Resident Minister in Algeria). Israel's intelligence services were well informed regarding events in Algeria, and in 1954 began to work closely with their French counterparts. In reality, Harkabi greatly exaggerated the information Israel had on Nasser's involvement

37 Ya'akov Tsur, *An Ambassador's Diary in Paris* (Tel Aviv, 1968) (in Hebrew), p. 15.

38 Bar-Zohar, *Bridge over the Mediterranean*, p. 43.

39 One of these interests was French negotiations with Syria for the purchase of French AMX tanks. The French military attaché in Damascus recommended to his government that it sell these tanks at a discount of 33 per cent in the hopes of 'beneficial political repercussions'; UK military attaché in Damascus to War Office, 8 December 1953, TNA, FO 371/110807 V1192/8.

40 Western Europe Section to Tsur, 20 December 1953, ISA 172/8.

41 Bar-Zohar, *Bridge over the Mediterranean*, pp. 60–61.

42 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 204.

with the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) in Algeria, his purpose to convince the French defence establishment of the wisdom of providing arms to Israel.[43]

During Dayan's visit, Israel obtained the agreement in principle of the French defence establishment to supply the Ouragan jets and AMX tanks that the Quai d'Orsay had blocked as well as Mystère-2 jets, radar equipment and SS-10 anti-tank missiles. French defence officials were also willing to consider the sale of 12 Mystère-4 aircraft, which were far superior to the Mystère-2.[44] The fall of the relatively pro-French Adib Shishakli in Damascus in February 1954 had heightened the desire of French defence officials for co-operation with Israel. However, the Quai wished to salvage France's influence there after Shishakli's ouster, used the Israeli threat to its interests in Syria as a pretext to continue to hold up arms shipments to Israel, and emphasized that Dayan was not a guest of the French government.[45] Nevertheless, Dayan met with Alexandre Parodi, who suggested that Israel was about to attack Syria. Dayan assured him that Israel had no such intention, telling the Secretary-General that Israel and France were 'bastions of the West in the region and had identical interests'.[46] Pierre Koenig, the pro-Israeli Minister of Defence, also warned Dayan that France did not wish to see a war between Israel and Syria. Dayan assured Koenig that Israel and Syria were close to reaching a *modus vivendi*, thereby greatly irritating Israel's diplomats, who considered Dayan's assurances to the French to be irresponsible.[47] In fact, in mid-1954 major exchanges of fire had marked the Israeli–Syrian border.[48] In any case, the French Foreign Ministry was unimpressed with Dayan's declarations and reduced the number of Mystère-2s that Israel would receive from the 30 they had requested to a mere six.[49]

On 9 August 1954, the Quai d'Orsay informed Britain that they intended to proceed with the sale of these six jets to Israel.[50] Britain strenuously opposed the French sale on the grounds that it would place in Israeli hands a weapon for which even the Royal Air Force in the Middle East had no answer.[51] The French Foreign Ministry attempted to justify the sale by claiming that it would strengthen the hand of Moshe Sharett, who as Prime Minister during Ben-Gurion's temporary retirement (December 1953–February 1955) attempted to steer a more moderate course in Israel's security affairs.[52] In the British view, the French were using the spectre of Mystères supplied to Israel to force Britain to abandon its plan to sell additional

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43 Author's interview with Yehoshafat Harkabi, 22 July 1990, Jerusalem.

44 Crosbie, *Tacit Alliance*, p. 45.

45 Tsur to Western Europe Section, 8 August 1954, ISA 163/1; British Embassy in Paris to Levant Department, 9 August 1954, TNA, FO 371/111123 VR1204/14.

46 Ben-Dor to Western Europe Section, 13 August 1954, ISA 163/12.

47 Avner to Ben-Dor, 27 August 1954, ISA 163/12.

48 See Nissim Bar-Ya'acov, *The Israeli–Syrian Armistice: Problems of Implementation, 1949–1966* (Jerusalem, 1966), pp. 217, 219.

49 Embassy in Paris to Foreign Office, 11 August 1954, TNA, FO 371/110813 V1192/332A.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., 10 August 1954, TNA, FO 371/110813 V1192/332.

52 Ibid., 25 September 1954, TNA, FO 371/110815 V1192/409.

Meteors to Syria.[53] The French claim that the sale would help Israel's moderates was disingenuous, because in September 1954 the Quai informed the Israeli embassy in Paris of its intention to sell arms to Egypt once the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement (of 1954) was signed.[54] France had hitherto refrained from selling arms to Egypt, but the French Foreign Ministry now wished to supply that country with no fewer than 25 Mystère-2 jets.[55]

The transfer to Egypt of 25 Mystère-2 aircraft was no means by which to strengthen Sharett's hand. But the Quai wished to 'compensate' Egypt for the Mystère sale to Israel and demonstrate to the Arab states that France showed Israel no favouritism.[56] The Quai told the Israelis that they, too, would be allowed to widen the scope of their arms purchases in France. But in fact the French Foreign Ministry referred to surplus items of which Israel had little need, and not to the tanks, planes and artillery pieces in which Israel was most interested.[57]

Israel's Arms Procurement Efforts, 1954–1955

During the months that followed Dayan's August 1954 visit to Paris, Shimon Peres and Yosef Nahmias of the Israeli Defence Ministry began to forge clandestine ties with a large number of high-ranking officials in the French government with a view to procuring arms. These efforts did not remain secret, and they heightened the determination of the Quai d'Orsay to repair the damage done to France's relations with the Arab world by publicity given to ties with Israel.[58] The Israeli embassy in Paris continued its attempt to convince the Quai to release the items promised to Israel and resented the Israeli Defence Ministry's demand that even more pressure be applied to the French Foreign Ministry. Shmuel Ben-Dor, counsellor at the embassy, complained that Shimon Peres 'cannot appear suddenly and demand that the embassy staff approach the secretary-general of the Quai d'Orsay just because someone has the feeling that the embassy is not operating with the proper enthusiasm on arms procurement'.[59]

At the same time, the Israeli Foreign Ministry demonstrated that it was no less concerned with arms purchases than its defence counterpart. In October 1954, Prime Minister Sharett met with Edouard Depreux, former French Minister of the Interior and an influential supporter of Israel. The Western Europe Section of the Foreign Ministry prepared a list of arguments regarding arms to Israel that the Prime Minister was to present Depreux and reminded Sharett that he should express no doubts regarding

53 10 August 1954, TNA, FO 371/110813 V1192/332.

54 Ben-Dor to Western Europe Section, 14 September 1954, ISA 163/12.

55 Embassy in Paris to Foreign Office, 11 August 1954, TNA, FO 371/110813 V1192/332.

56 Embassy in Paris to Levant Department, 11 August 1954, TNA, FO 371/110813 V1192/332A.

57 Meeting at the Foreign Ministry on relations with France, 21 September 1954, ISA 164/4.

58 Najar to Tsur, 11 January 1955, ISA 192/41.

59 Ben-Dor to Najar, 22 October 1954, ISA 188/1.

French–Israeli friendship.[60] Nevertheless, the view of the Foreign Ministry was that 'closer relations with France should be approached with caution. It is doubtful whether France would be willing to concentrate on Israel and abandon the Arab states.'[61]

In early 1955, the signing of a defence agreement between Iraq and Turkey and the danger that it posed to Israel brought Sharett to consider an approach to all three Western powers for guarantees of Israel's security.[62] But the idea of a security guarantee from France aroused considerable opposition in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, best expressed by Ben-Dor:

> If there are those with ruminations about our ties with France, I am one of them … If I may be allowed to use military terminology, I would say that from the point of view of our long-term diplomatic strategy, we should be wary of an over-identification or too close an association with France. We must for the moment exploit the existence of mutual interests. In this case, too, we must act carefully lest our 'partner' disappoint us at a critical moment, either because of domestic weaknesses or vacillating diplomatic considerations.[63]

In fact, the Israeli government did not make such an approach. The French claimed that co-operation could in any case take place only in the framework of opposition to the Baghdad Pact, and would have to include the Arab states.[64] Nevertheless, the head of the Western Europe Section noted that Israel's position dictated behaving towards the French *as if* Israel saw them as loyal partners, because the prospects of obtaining military hardware in France appeared more promising than those in either the United States or Britain.[65]

The Israelis hoped that France's objections to the Anglo-American arming of Iraq might prompt Paris to sell them arms.[66] However, the claim that Ben-Gurion's return to the government as minister of defence in February 1955 brought about a decision to equip the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) exclusively with French arms is unfounded.[67] One of the few documents that reveal details regarding the arms procurement policies of the Israeli Defence Ministry clearly demonstrates that Israel had no intention of allowing France to become its only source of arms.[68] Thus, for instance, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) preferred to postpone the purchase of jets until France released Mystères for sale. But the Israelis would judge arms from various sources upon their merits, and under no circumstances would the Israeli Ministry of Defence agree to limitations regarding procurement options, as Israel attempted to obtain arms from France while concurrently making every effort to obtain arms from the United States and Britain.

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60 Najar to Sharett, 13 October 1954, ISA 163/12.

61 Meeting at the Foreign Ministry on relations with France, 21 September 1954, ISA 164/4.

62 Moshe Sharett, *Personal Diary* (Tel Aviv, 1978), p. 712 (in Hebrew).

63 Ben-Dor to Tsur, 10 February 1955, ISA 192/41.

64 Najar to Tsur, 2 March 1955, ISA 194/3.

65 Western Europe Section to Embassy in Paris, 20 December 1954, ISA 180/1; Western Europe Section to Tsur, 23 February 1955, ISA 192/41; see also an assessment by the British Embassy in Washington, 31 December 1954, TNA, FO 371/110817 V1192/4.

66 Ben-Dor to Tsur, 10 February 1955, ISA 192/41.

67 Bar-Zohar, *Bridge over the Mediterranean*, p. 65.

68 Western Europe Section to Embassy in Paris, 20 December 1954, ISA 180/1.

Israel's efforts during 1955 to secure either the Mystère-2 or Mystère-4 also came to naught.[69] At the end of March 1955, Nahmias was convinced that France's failure to authorize Mystères was due only to delays in production that it would overcome within two to three months.[70] By July 1955, 12 Israeli pilots were training on Mystère-2s in France and by the end of August, Israel had secured a commitment for the sale of 15 of these jets.[71] France promised that it would release the first Mystère-2s during the second half of September 1955, and early that month Israel approached the British Air Ministry with a request for staging rights through Nicosia, Cyprus, for the first five jets.[72]

In early October 1955, France informed the Near East Arms Coordinating Committee (NEACC) of its intention to supply Israel with 12 Ouragan combat jets instead of Mystères. The Quai d'Orsay told the British that Ouragans would suit Israel's purpose while not presenting a problem to the RAF.[73] In truth, the French Foreign Ministry's decision was based less on a perceived need to placate Britain than on a desire to moderate Egyptian hostility towards France in North Africa. Moreover, Quai officials told the Israelis that France was willing to sell heavy arms to Egypt, because Cairo was not transferring those to Algeria.[74] In Israeli eyes, however, France's decision to sell them an inferior jet was based on both its displeasure at Israel's vigorous protests at French arms to its Arab rivals as well as the campaign to convince the Jews of North Africa to emigrate to Israel.[75]

The Czech–Egyptian arms deal of September 1955 forced Israel to heighten its efforts to obtain arms in France. Yet to the staff of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, this was a distasteful task. In their view, the aid that French defence officials had hitherto extended came only because of their hostility to Egypt, and was thus out of 'hatred of Haman rather than love of Mordechai'.[76] In early January 1956, Pierre Maillard, head of the Levant desk at the Quai d'Orsay, told Ambassador Tsur that many French defence officials were willing to supply Israel with arms out of narrow financial interests and 'blind hatred of the Arabs', but were themselves openly anti-Semitic.[77]

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69 On 20 July 1955, Israel requested that all of the Mystères for which they had applied be of the Mark-4 type; Bar-Zohar, *Bridge over the Mediterranean*, p. 87.

70 Ben-Dor to Najar, 31 March 1955, ISA 188/1.

71 Under Secretary of State for Air to Foreign Office, 28 July 1955, TNA, FO 371/115565 V1192/323. The records make it difficult to determine whether at this point Israel thought that these would be Mystère-4s. France assured Britain that it did not intend to supply Israel with Mystère-4s; Embassy in Paris to Foreign Office, 22 August 1955, TNA, FO 371/115566 V1192/345A.

72 Jeffery to Tupman (Ministry of Defence), 16 September 1955, TNA, FO 371/115568 V1192/381; minute by Shuckburgh, 2 September 1955, TNA, FO 371/115568 V1192/388.

73 British Embassy in Paris to Foreign Office, 7 October 1955, TNA, FO 371/115570 V1192/452.

74 Ben-Dor to Tolkovsky, 22 July 1955, ISA 188/1.

75 Avni to Rafael, 2 September 1955, ISA 194/4; Ben-Dor to Western Europe Section, 10 October 1955, ISA 192/41; Navon to Shek, 20 October 1955, ISA 192/41.

76 Tsur to Western Europe Section, 24 June 1955, ISA 188/1.

77 Tsur to Western Europe Section, 11 January 1956, ISA 193/1.

Yet as Gazit points out, the Foreign Ministry never called into question the exigency of doing everything possible to obtain arms.[78] On 22 October 1955, Peres, Harkabi and General Haim Laskov met with Sharett to draw up a list of military items that the Prime Minister would present to his French counterpart, Edgar Faure. Peres and the two generals placed on the list 40 Super-Sherman tanks, 500 bazookas and the Mystère-4 jet rather than the Mark 2 model. Sharett thought that there was little chance of obtaining arms from France, especially a weapon such as the Mystère-4.[79] Faure's government was unstable and expected soon to fall (its demise came on 25 November 1955). In such circumstances it seemed to the Israeli Foreign Ministry unlikely that Israel would be able to circumvent the Quai d'Orsay. Furthermore, senior Israeli diplomats harboured a sense of foreboding with regard to the future of relations with France should they succeed in 'cuckolding' the Quai.[80]

Sharett met with Faure on 25 October 1955, and the latter agreed to supply everything the Israelis requested, including the Mystère-4 jet.[81] Sharett was amazed at the alacrity with which the French Prime Minister assented, but was also suspicious. Was such haste not rash and irresponsible?[82] On 10 November, Shimon Peres secured a separate contract from the French Defence Ministry. The list of arms that the French Defence Ministry was prepared to supply was extensive. The contract did not include the Mystère-4 jet, because that aircraft was until July 1956 subject to US control of offshore procurement, but among the major items were 60 AMX-13 tanks, 40 Super-Sherman tanks, 1000 SS-10 anti-tank missiles and 500 bazookas.[83] This contract infuriated the Quai d'Orsay. Foreign Minister Antoine Pinay took Ambassador Tsur severely to task over this break with diplomatic protocol and affront to the authority of his office. Yet Tsur wrote that although 'the matter of arms will stand between us for a long time, on this we can under no circumstances retreat'.[84]

Israel's Kinneret Raid and the Arms Embargo

Israel's attack on Syrian positions on the northeastern shore of Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee) on the night of 11 December 1955 provided the Quai d'Orsay with a new reason to block the supply of arms to Israel.[85] Bar-On claims that the French attitude toward this large-scale retaliatory operation was one of ambivalence. He notes Peres's impression that 'the French did not care all that much about the shooting around the Kinneret' as well as Tsur's observation on 20 December that 'the reaction

78 Mordechai Gazit, 'Sharett, Ben-Gurion and the Arms Deal with France, 1956', *Gesher*, 108 (Winter 1983): 86–100 (in Hebrew).

79 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, p. 1239.

80 Ben-Dor to Avner, 18 October 1955, ISA 192/41.

81 Gazit, 'Sharett, Ben-Gurion and the Arms Deal', p. 90.

82 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, p. 1251.

83 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, pp. 188–91.

84 Tsur, *Ambassador's Diary*, pp. 201–2, 205; Tsur to Najar, 13 January 1956, ISA 194/3.

85 Najar to Sharett, 5 January 1956, ISA 193/1.

was less forceful than I had feared'.[86] However, as Tsur's diary clearly indicates, the Israelis made these observations when they still thought that France intended to deliver arms in accordance with the recently signed contract.[87] Instead, the Kinneret operation was damaging to Israeli–French relations, because its effect was a serious blow to a Syrian regime the stability of which most of official Paris considered a major French interest.

Following the Kinneret operation, France joined the United States and Britain in an arms embargo on Israel that continued until February 1956.[88] In his diary entry of 1 January 1956, Sharett referred to Ben-Gurion's depression over this embargo and to Peres, who in Sharett's words had 'realized that he is not such an eminent authority, with everything obtainable in France through string-pulling and underhandedness'. In truth, Sharett's references to the dismay of Ben-Gurion and Peres were less an expression of *Schadenfreude* at their discomfort over the results of the Kinneret raid than of the Foreign Minister's view that the operation was a 'stab in the back' of Israel's arms purchase efforts. Sharett's diary account of his 16 December 1955 meeting with Foreign Minister Pinay includes only the laconic observation that Pinay met his request for arms with a vague response.[89]

Yet Pinay's account reveals that Sharett staunchly defended Israel's action against Syria and queried the French foreign minister as to when Israel could expect to receive *60* Mystère-4 jets. Pinay's response also demonstrated to Sharett how disparate were the Israeli and French views of the Israel–Syria conflict. The French minister gave no answer on the jets, but concluded the meeting by deploring the gratuitous attack on Syria, as that country had not menaced Israel.[90] In fact, less than one month before the Kinneret raid Tsur had warned that the French Foreign Ministry was in a 'panic' at the thought that Israel might, through conflict with Damascus, 'push Syria into Iraqi arms'. The ambassador reminded Walter Eytan, the Director General of the Foreign Ministry, that in France 'strengthening Syria against a possible Iraqi attack is the policy of both Israel's supporters and its opponents. Military circles struggling against [French] arms to Egypt are unwilling to lift a finger to withhold arms from Syria. The French do not see Syria as a danger to Israel'.[91]

On 9 January 1956, the Western Europe Section of the Israeli Foreign Ministry informed Sharett that during the month following the Kinneret raid the domestic political situation in Syria had deteriorated considerably. The French had to use their influence in Damascus in order to discourage a Syrian military response to Israel, fearing that the failure of such an operation would bring about a pro-Iraqi coup in the Syrian capital.[92] Anger at Israel over these circumstances had grown not only at

86 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 193.

87 Tsur, *Ambassador's Diary*, p. 208.

88 Minute of Levant Department, 28 February 1956, TNA, FO 371/121330 V1192/251; Embassy in Washington to Foreign Office, 7 March 1956, TNA, FO 371/121331 V1192/280.

89 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, pp. 1309, 1312, 1323.

90 Circular memo by Pinay, 21 December 1955, Archives des Affaires étrangères de la France (Paris) 1955, 2: 966–7.

91 Tsur to Eytan, 15 November 1955, ISA 194/4.

92 Record of conversation between Marc Jarblum (head of the French section of the World Jewish Congress) and Pierre Maillard, 5 January 1956, ISA 193/1.

the Quai d'Orsay, but also at French army headquarters.[93] This ire, noted the head of Western Europe Section, had 'done more damage than expected and is at the center of their interpretation of the Kinneret incident'.[94]

Circumventing the Quai d'Orsay

At the beginning of February 1956, Guy Mollet formed a new socialist-led government in France. Christian Pineau became Foreign Minister, pro-Israeli Radical Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury the Defence Minister, and Abel Thomas, a close associate of Bourgès-Maunoury and also sympathetic to Israel, became Director General of the French Defence Ministry. When these men took office, France was negotiating with Syria for the sale to that country of 50 AMX tanks, 20 105mm self-propelled guns, 10 105mm Howitzers, and 10–15 155mm guns.[95] The Western arms embargo in reaction to the Kinneret operation had made the Israelis chary of renewed conflict with Syria, and in mid-February 1956 Israel halted work on its Jordan River project on the Syrian border.[96] On 10 February 1956, Pineau told Tsur that France would now honour outstanding arms contracts with Egypt.[97] France's representatives at the NEACC had in November 1955 requested authorization to sell Egypt an additional 30 AMX-13 tanks and 30 155mm Howitzers, and on 10 January 1956 informed the NEACC that they intended to proceed with the sale.[98]

The sharp French reaction to the Kinneret raid, French determination to continue to arm Damascus and Pineau's policy of rapprochement with Egypt reinforced the Israeli view that France was intent upon pursuing a Middle East policy completely at odds with Israel's interests. When Tsur protested about this policy to Maillard of the Levant desk, the latter replied that in the long term, among the Arab states it would be Egypt that would make peace with Israel. Mallaird contrasted Egypt with Iraq, Israeli accommodation with which could not be envisioned at all.[99]

At the same time, the French foreign minister resisted the urgings of his own staff that France keep arms out of Israeli hands.[100] On 2 February 1956, Pineau decided to end France's part in the embargo and to release the arms for which Israel already had a contract. The contract included 8 155-mm Howitzers, 20 75mm guns for mounting on Sherman tanks, and 30 AMX-13 tanks. Pineau did not elaborate on his decision, simply informing Geoffroy de Courcel, the Permanent Secretary General for

93 Najar to Sharett, 9 January 1956, ISA 193/1. This is also what the French military attaché in Tel Aviv told Peres two days later, when Peres expressed his anxiety and apprehension at the French decision to withhold arms from Israel. Livry to Billotte, 11 January 1956, Archives des Affaires étrangères de la France, 1956, 1:33.

94 Najar to Tsur, 11 January 1956, ISA 193/1.

95 Ibid.

96 Tsur to Najar, 3 February 1956, ISA 193/1; Sharett, *Personal Diary*, pp. 1350–51.

97 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 195.

98 Minute by Hadow, 9 November 1955, TNA, FO 371/115576 V1192/600; BJSM, Washington to Ministry of Defence, 10 January 1956, TNA, FO 371/121322 V1192/26.

99 Tsur to Western Europe Section, 11 January 1956, ISA 193/1.

100 Bar-Zohar, *Bridge over the Mediterranean*, pp. 94–7.

National Defence, that he saw no point in continuing the embargo.[101] Nevertheless, the most important item for Israel was the Mystère-4. The contacts that Peres and Nahmias had earlier established with Bourgès-Maunoury and Thomas helped secure French agreement by the end of February 1956 to sell Israel 12 Mystère-4A jets. On 28 February 1956, France asked for NEACC approval for the sale of these jets as well as all of the items for which Israel had contracted in late 1955. This was not yet one of the 'big arms deals', but it included hundreds of parachutes and 50 napalm petroleum drop tanks, items to which Britain objected completely. We will see that much larger arms deals with Israel prompted the Quai to try to salvage its position in the Arab world by attempting to use the NEACC to obstruct arms transfers to Israel upon which the French government had already decided. On this occasion, the French Foreign Ministry informed British representatives to the NEACC that the sale of 12 Mystère-4s was justified in light of the Soviet sale of MiG combat aircraft to Egypt.[102] On 11 April 1956, the first three of the initial dozen Mystère-4s which the Israelis were to receive arrived in Israel.

The advent of arms to Israel notwithstanding, Antoine Pinay thought, as late as March 1956, that he could bring about a Franco-Egyptian accord that would take pressure off France in Algeria and allow Paris to play a mediating role in the Middle East.[103] Bourgès-Maunoury convinced Pineau that Egyptian hostility and the rapid deterioration of France's position in Algeria justified accelerated arms sales to Israel.[104] Syria's close ties with Egypt and Soviet arms transfers to Damascus heightened Syrian hostility to France.[105] This made more difficult the Quai's attempts to present relations with Syria as a reason to deny Israel arms.[106] The French leaders agreed that large-scale arms transfers to Israel were feasible only if the normal channels of the French Foreign Ministry were circumvented, because the Quai opposed the sales.[107]

On 17 April 1956, Guy Mollet also demanded that the Israeli embassy in Paris cease all contact with the French Defence Ministry. This demand was based not on concern that Tsur and the embassy staff would interfere with arms deals, but rather on Mollet's desire that only he and Pineau make decisions, which they would pass on for execution to the Defence Ministry. Mollet the Socialist did not want

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101 See Pineau to de Courcel, 2 February 1956, Archives des affaires étrangères de la France, 1956, 1: 146–47.

102 Minute of Levant Department, 28 February 1956, TNA, FO 371/121330 V1192/251. BJSM, Washington to Ministry of Defence, 4 October 1956, TNA, FO 371/121354 V1192/928. France did not in the end supply Israel with napalm bombs.

103 Pinkus, *From Ambivalence to Tacit Alliance*, p. 490.

104 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 197.

105 In 1956, the Soviet Union transferred to Syria 25 MiG-15 jets and 100 BTR armoured personnel carriers. See Embassy in Damascus to Foreign Office, 23 May 1956, TNA, FO 371/121340 V1192/554; *Arms Trade Registers*, 64–5.

106 Tsur to Western Europe Section, 7 June 1956, ISA 193/1; Ben-Dor to Tsur, 29 June, ISA 192/2. Nevertheless, the British Joint Staffs Mission in Washington reported a French request to supply Syria with 12 155mm guns, 40 81mm mortars, 20 120mm mortars, and large amounts of ammunition; BJSM, Washington to Ministry of Defence, 22 May 1956, TNA, FO 371/121340 V1192/561.

107 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 200.

Bourgès-Maunoury, of the Radical Party, to conduct simultaneous discussions with the Israeli embassy, as it might create the impression that Bourgès-Maunoury was doing more for Israel than Mollet was.[108] At the end of April 1956, France authorized the sale to Israel of an additional 12 Mystère-4As, a transaction from which both the French and Israeli Foreign Ministries were excluded.[109] Yet it should again be noted that the parallel exclusion of both foreign ministries from involvement in weapons deals was a matter of bureaucratic similitude and did not correspond to an affinity in policy between the Israeli Foreign Ministry and its French counterpart.

Moshe Sharett and the staff of the Foreign Ministry reacted with indignation at removal from the procurement effort in which they had been all along involved. At a meeting on 3 April 1956 that included Ben-Gurion, Sharett, Peres and Dayan, the Chief of Staff cited what he claimed were the achievements of Peres alone with regard to procurement in France. Dayan demanded an end to the involvement of the embassy in Paris in arms matters, and Ben-Gurion supported Dayan's position. Sharett wrote angrily in his diary that it was as though 'Tsur had not lifted a finger and as if the whole great episode had not commenced with my meeting with Faure at the end of October [1955]'.[110]

On 18 March 1956, the Israeli Prime Minister had warned that 'war within a few months could not be avoided unless Israel obtained the arms needed to counter Egypt's weapons'.[111] Ben-Gurion attributed what he claimed was Sharett's failure to secure the large arms deal with France to the foreign minister's disagreement with Ben-Gurion that a clash with Egypt was inevitable.[112] The Prime Minister later implied that Sharett had not pursued a large arms deal with France because he feared that Ben-Gurion would use those weapons to attack Egypt.[113]

Thus, the April 1956 meeting foreshadowed Sharett's resignation, which Ben-Gurion forced, on 18 June 1956. By way of comparison, the reaction of the French Foreign Ministry was one of frustration at being flanked by the French Defence Ministry through arms sales to Israel that the Quai thought undermined France's true interests in the Middle East. In mid-March 1956, Maillard told Ben-Dor that these arms deals were an aberration beyond which there was no basis for co-operation between the two countries. Ben-Dor responded with lip service to the ostensible common interests of both Israel and France in the Middle East: opposition to the Baghdad Pact, status quo with regard to Syria, and a partnership against Egypt.[114] But the attitude of the Quai d'Orsay and the ongoing inter-office struggle in Paris

108 Gazit, 'Sharett, Ben-Gurion and the Arms Deal', p. 90.

109 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, pp. 200–202.

110 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, pp. 1385–6. Sharett later wrote to Ben-Gurion about his 'deep resentment … at the utter disregard for the decisive role of the Foreign Ministry in the entire operation'; Gazit, 'Sharett, Ben-Gurion and the Arms Deal', p. 95; also author's interview with Gershon Avner, 21 October 1989, Jerusalem.

111 Nadav Safran, *Israel: The Embattled Ally* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), p. 352.

112 Selwyn Ilan Troen, 'The Sinai War as a "War of no Alternative": Ben-Gurion's View of the Arab–Israeli Conflict', in Selwyn Ilan Troen and Moshe Shemesh (eds), *The Suez–Sinai Crisis 1956, Retrospective and Reappraisal* (London, 1990), pp. 183–4.

113 Gazit, 'Sharett, Ben-Gurion and the Arms Deal', p. 91.

114 Ben-Dor to Tsur, 11 March 1956, ISA 193/1.

made the Israelis leery of future instability in the relationship with France even as modern French military hardware arrived in Israel. In May 1956, Tsur wrote:

> Despite our achievements – and they are by no means insignificant – I do not predict a rosy future for procurement in France. The Algerian struggle has placed in our hand a card and aroused a wave of admiration for Israel among wide circles in France. Yet in truth, this is admiration born of desperation … Sympathy for Israel and honest concern for its fate are diluted by the fear of a chasm between France and the Arab world.[115]

On 23 June 1956, a four-man Israeli delegation met near Paris with French defence officials and signed a contract for a large quantity of modern arms, for which Israel agreed to pay $80 million. The Israeli representatives at this meeting were Peres, Dayan, Harkabi, Mordechai Bar-On (Dayan's bureau chief), Yosef Nahmias and Emanuel Nashri, the Israeli military attaché in France. Among the French officials who received them at Vermars were Pierre Boursicot, head of the Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre Espionnage (SDECE), Abel Thomas and Louis Mangin of the French Defence Ministry, and Maurice Challe, Deputy Chief of Staff of the French army.[116] This was the principal French–Israeli arms transaction in 1956, France providing Israel with 72 Mystère-4A jets, 120 AMX-13 tanks, 40 Super-Sherman tanks, artillery pieces, ammunition and spare parts. In Ben-Gurion's view, the opportunity to obtain a large quantity of modern arms dictated agreement to the close ties that French defence officials now pressed upon Israel. The French defence establishment, noted Harkabi, hoped for a much closer intelligence relationship with Israel, especially in light of what it thought the Israelis knew about rebel activities in Algeria.[117]

Ben-Gurion enthused that 'with an ally like France, Israel is willing to go all the way'.[118] Yet Peres later wrote, 'Ben-Gurion began to appreciate the relations between the two countries only with great reluctance', and Bar-On points out that the Israelis were not eager to participate in 'unnecessary adventures'.[119] In truth, Bourgès-Maunoury, who urged upon his government a closer relationship with Israel, did not think Israel had much to offer France beyond intelligence sharing. The French defence minister saw in a well-armed Israel France's most effective deterrent against Egypt, although even Nasser's 26 July 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal did not immediately bring French leaders to contemplate military action. In August 1956, France and Britain began contingency planning for a joint operation against Egypt, but initially there was no intention of including Israel.[120]

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115 Tsur to Eban, 22 May 1956, ISA 194/3.

116 See accounts of the Vermars conference in Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 205; Pinkus, *From Ambivalence to Tacit Alliance*, p. 524.

117 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 205.

118 Ibid., p. 207.

119 Shimon Peres, 'The Road to Sèvres: Franco-Israeli Cooperation', in Troen and Shemesh (eds), *Suez–Sinai Crisis, 1956*, p. 140; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 207.

120 Jean-Paul Cointet, 'Guy Mollet, the French Government and the SFIO', in Troen and Shemesh (eds), *Suez–Sinai Crisis*, 1956, p. 133; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, pp. 204, 207.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry noted that the Quai d'Orsay was still determined to stymie the close ties the French Defence Ministry was forging with Israel and to bridge the growing gap between France and the Arab states.[121] It was clear to the Israelis that the French Foreign Ministry's efforts were an ominous portent for the future of their relations with France, because the French defence establishment's ascendancy in the determination of France's regional policy was temporary. At the end of June 1956, the Quai d'Orsay authorized the sale of 155mm howitzers to Egypt, reflecting Pineau's remaining ambivalence regarding ties with Israel and the scale of weaponry France was selling Israel.[122] Only in July 1956 was Tsur able to report to Israel's new Foreign Minister, Golda Meir, a promise by Pineau to halt all arms sales to Arab countries.[123]

Yet even in early July 1956, Israel's acquisition of all of the aircraft the French Defence Ministry had promised was not completely certain. That month, the Quai d'Orsay's representatives at the NEACC defended France's decision to sell Israel an initial consignment of 12 Mystère-4A jets. But when Mollet, Pineau and Bourgès-Maunoury decided to sell Israel a total of 72 Mystères, the bureaucracy of the Quai resisted and attempted to manoeuvre the British and US representatives at the NEACC into blocking these sales.[124] In fact, such efforts by the Quai through the NEACC were useless, because France's disregard of American and British objections to these large-scale arms transfers meant that that body had in effect ceased to function as a regulatory agency. In the opinion of one British official, the NEACC had become a committee for the rearming of Israel.[125] Nevertheless, the French Foreign Ministry set as its goal a radical change in France's arms policy toward Israel at the first opportunity. Maillard had already told Israel's diplomats in Paris of the deep anti-Israel sentiment among high officials at the Quai d'Orsay: French–Israeli friendship was based 'solely on the blood spilled in North Africa and bound to change at any moment'.[126]

Intelligence Sharing, Nuclear Sharing and the Second Arms Deal of 1956

During the summer of 1956, France and Israel broadened considerably the scope of their intelligence sharing, primarily with regard to Egypt. The French defence establishment's interest in Egypt's military deployment increased following the nationalization of the Suez Canal, and Ben-Gurion personally instructed the IDF to supply intelligence that Bourgès-Maunoury requested. In early August 1956, the French Chief of Staff, Paul Ely, requested that Israel carry out aerial photography of Egyptian military installations and provide information regarding the capacity

121 Tsur to Western Europe Section, 15 June 1956, ISA 194/3.

122 Ben-Dor to Western Europe Section, 28 June 1956, ISA 194/3. It was not possible to determine the number of guns the French wished to sell to Egypt. See also Tsur to Western Europe Section, 28 June 1956, ISA 194/3.

123 Tsur to Meir, 2 July 1956, ISA 330/7.

124 Embassy in Washington to Foreign Office, 5 July 1956, TNA, FO 371/121348 V1192/755.

125 Ibid.

126 Ben-Dor to Tsur, 11 March 1956, ISA 193/1.

of Israel's ports and airfields. Dayan was interested only in arms, and unwilling to take any initiative with regard to the co-operation that the French intelligence chiefs requested. Ben-Gurion told his reluctant Chief of Staff: 'We must relate to them as brothers. The aid they are providing and our partnership with them is vital to us; we must cooperate with all our heart.'[127]

In early September 1956, France initiated discussions with Israel on the possibility of Israeli participation in an Anglo-French operation against Egypt. Ben-Gurion had become convinced that the Israeli alternative to such participation was a campaign in which Israel would stand alone against Egypt.[128] The Israeli Prime Minister, who also held the defence portfolio, sent Brigadier Meir Amit, IDF Chief of Operations, to a 7 September preliminary co-ordination session with French Admiral Pierre Barjot.[129] At a meeting in France on 30 September, Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres met at St. Germain with Pineau, Bourgès-Maunoury and Thomas. At that meeting, the Israeli foreign minister enumerated the conditions that Ben-Gurion had set down as essential for Israel's participation. The first was French recognition of Israel's limitations with regard to armour and aerial capability; the tanks Israel had received from France would be fully integrated into the IDF only at the beginning of January 1957, and the jets on 1 March. The second condition was British co-operation in and American prior knowledge of the operation. The third condition was Israeli control of the coast off the Strait of Tiran.[130] In fact, the assurances the French gave Israel with regard to British co-operation and American tacit consent were vague, for France had secured Britain's participation only at a secret conference at Sèvres on 22 October 1956, and both France and Britain withheld knowledge of Operation Musketeer from the United States.[131]

Nevertheless, in the Israeli view, France's willingness to sell even more arms was a critical factor in Israel's ability to contemplate military co-operation. At the end of September 1956, France agreed to augment the arms deal of June with another large-scale transaction to be implemented in October. The principal items in this contract were an additional 100 Super-Sherman tanks, 200 armoured personnel carriers, 300 six-by-six trucks and 20 tank transporters. France transferred this hardware to Israel several days before the 29 October attack on Egypt.[132]

At the same time, Israeli and French representatives conducted talks in Paris regarding France's supply to Israel of a nuclear reactor. Yet it is important to note that scholars differ over two principal aspects of this dimension of the French–Israeli strategic relationship. The first element concerns timing, and a second aspect is a connection between nuclear co-operation and joint military planning. Thus, according to Avner Cohen, from the beginning of 1956, Shimon Peres devoted much

127 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, pp. 207, 220–21.

128 Ben-Gurion's diary, 25 September 1956, BGA.

129 Pinkus, *From Ambivalence to Tacit Alliance*, p. 572.

130 Ben-Gurion's diary, 25 September 1956, BGA.

131 See Peres, 'The Road to Sèvres', p. 143. For a highly critical account of this conference, see Avi Shlaim, 'The Protocol of Sèvres, 1956: Anatomy of a War Plot', *International Affairs*, 73/3 (1997): 509–30.

132 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 268.

of his time in Paris to convincing France to assist Israel in developing a programme that would enable it to produce its own nuclear weapons.[133] But Pinkus takes issue with Cohen's suggestion that at the June 1956 Vermars Conference, Ben-Gurion's consent to set up a special link between Israeli military intelligence and its French parallel implies that the Prime Minister agreed, *inter alia*, to the secret transfer of military information in exchange for nuclear assistance.[134] In Pinkus's view, there is nothing to back up this assertion.

First, as Pinkus notes, none of those directly involved in French–Israeli contacts recall any discussion on nuclear assistance, either before or during the Vermars Conference, or that it was made conditional on Israeli intelligence co-operation or mutual activity. Second, according to Pinkus, the first phase of negotiations regarding a nuclear reactor took place on 17–18 September, and on 22 September, under the direct supervision of Bourgès-Maunoury. Moreover, writes Pinkus, 'the crucial stage in the bi-level contacts began with a meeting between Peres and Abel Thomas, the Director-General of the French Defense Ministry, on October 20, 1956, during which the main points of the French–Israeli nuclear agreement were drawn up'. Pinkus quotes Peres in order to elucidate the matter of timing:

> Before the final signing, I asked Ben-Gurion to call for a short break so that I could meet alone with Guy Mollet and Bourgès-Maunoury. Here I crystallized an agreement with the two leaders on the construction of a nuclear reactor in Dimona … and the supply of natural uranium … and after an argument they approved.'[135]

As Pinkus points out:

> a careful study of the testimonies of the participants to the Sèvres Conference shows that the first meeting between Bourgès-Maunoury and Peres on nuclear issues took place on the first day of the conference prior to the arrival of the British delegation led by Foreign Minister Selwyn Lloyd. In other words, it was held on October 22, whereas the meeting that Peres described occurred at the end of the conference, on October 24, in the presence of Mollet who had already agreed on the principles of the soon-to-be signed agreement. Furthermore, the French made no stipulation regarding the sale and construction of the Dimona reactor with Israel's consent to join the alliance.[136]

Conclusion

At the beginning of 1956, Ben-Gurion wrote of his apprehensions regarding a military undertaking against Egypt. Israel had an interest in striking a blow at Nasser, and the ties forged between the defence establishments as well as among the leaders of both countries from June to October 1956 contributed greatly to the confidence necessary for an Israeli decision to participate in a joint military operation. Nevertheless, the

133 Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York, 1998), pp. 52–5.

134 Benjamin Pinkus, 'Atomic Power to Israel's Rescue: French–Israeli Nuclear Cooperation, 1949–1957', *Israel Studies*, 7/1 (2002): 118.

135 Ibid., p. 120.

136 Ibid., p. 121.

Israeli Prime Minister feared that Egypt's Soviet-supplied bombers would destroy large sections of Israel's cities. He considered French protection in an armed clash with Egypt insufficient, and the Israelis continued to harbour deep reservations about military co-operation with France. Yet Ben-Gurion also knew that the aid that France provided Israel was not a matter of philanthropy. Israel could not brush aside French urgings that it participate in the campaign that France proposed.[137]

The common ground that Israel and France found in enmity to Nasser was the basis for military co-operation between the two states. For the Israelis, France's willingness to continue to provide arms on a large scale was a major factor in Israel's agreement to participate in a joint armed venture. Moreover, the decision to accept this co-operation bore out what an Israeli diplomat told the French Ambassador to Israel at the beginning of 1956: 'Only the country that supplied arms in quantities worthy of that term would have the privilege of a listening ear among Israel's leaders.'[138]

137 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, pp. 261–2.

138 Najar to Tsur, 1 February 1956, ISA 193/1.

Chapter 7

Supporting the Brave Young King: The Suez Crisis and Eisenhower's New Approach to Jordan, 1953–1958

Clea Lutz Bunch

The Suez crisis is often viewed as a watershed in Anglo-American politics, an event heralding the decline of British power in the Middle East. Less emphasized, yet still significant, is the role that Suez played in articulating inter-Arab rivalries and dividing Middle East nations into pro-Western and pro-Soviet Cold War camps. The military action at Suez, by exposing the vulnerability of the region and highlighting the strategic importance of the Middle East, inspired President Dwight Eisenhower to reconsider his approach to the region and redefine American commitments to the Arab world and Israel. In the wake of Suez, Eisenhower shed his disdain for Middle Eastern monarchies and sought to strengthen pro-Western regimes in an effort to contain the Egyptian President, Gamal Abdel Nasser. The White House subsequently reconsidered arms restrictions to the region, abandoned notions of supporting Arab nationalism, and strengthened the American commitment to conservative Arab regimes.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as a weak, anti-Soviet monarchy, became the beneficiary of Eisenhower's new approach to the Middle East following Suez.[1] During the period 1953–58, the Jordanian position in America's strategic Middle East policy underwent a distinct transformation. The country – once perceived as an insignificant remnant of British imperialism – rapidly became known as an important bulwark against communist penetration in the Middle East. Ironically, this change in American policy occurred due to the actions of Nasser, the Jordanian king's rival and gadfly. The Suez crisis, by allowing Nasser to position himself as the champion of Arab nationalism, forced the Eisenhower administration to rethink policies designed to accommodate or contain the charismatic Egyptian leader. Instead, policymakers focused on promoting alternative popular leadership in the region and strengthening pro-Western regimes. Jordan's King Hussein, with his unstable, economically insecure monarchy, gained substantial support from Eisenhower's new policies.

1 For a detailed narrative of President Eisenhower's Middle East policy, see Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004).

A 'New Look' at an Old Problem

Rejecting the policies of his predecessor, Harry Truman, President Eisenhower attempted to chart a unique course in his efforts to address the conflict with the Soviet Union. The resulting 'New Look' advocated an overall reduction in America's conventional military forces while amassing a deterrent nuclear arsenal. As a consequence of the New Look, the United States rejected large-scale territorial commitments, and instead focused on defending key regions of global strategic importance. The Middle East, as a vital source of petroleum needed for European post-war recovery, embodied Eisenhower's definition of a key strategic region.[2]

Cold War considerations informed the core principles of Eisenhower's Middle East policies. Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, viewed the region as ripe for communist penetration; as such, they were determined to prevent the 'fall' of this critical portion of the globe. As in Eastern Europe and East Asia, the 'domino theory' influenced the administration's perceptions of the Middle East. Dulles insisted:

> I thought it of the utmost importance for the welfare of the United States that we should get away from a political basis and try to develop a national non-partisan policy. Otherwise, we would be apt to lose the whole area and possibly Africa, and this would be a major disaster for Western Europe as well as the United States.[3]

The continued economic stability of Western Europe depended on a constant supply of petroleum from the Middle East; thus, Eisenhower and Dulles undertook ambitious plans to prevent Soviet intrusion and promote pro-Western governments.

Yet Eisenhower recognized that attempting to control this critical resource was, at best, problematic: 'There is, of course, no easy answer,' Eisenhower stated. 'The oil of the Arab world had grown increasingly important to all of Europe. The economy of European countries would collapse if those oil supplies were cut off.' He also understood that the perennial border disputes between Israel and its Arab neighbours could rapidly escalate to full-scale war – one that might threaten Western economies and necessitate American military intervention: 'Should a crisis arise threatening to cut the Western world off from Mid East oil,' he noted, 'we would have to use force.'[4] Thus acknowledging the critical nature of petroleum resources, Eisenhower pursued an ambitious agenda to stabilize the region and cultivate goodwill.

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2 For thorough descriptions of Eisenhower's approach to the Soviets, see Chester Pach and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Lawrence, KS, 1991); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York, 1982); Christopher Tudda, *The Truth is Our Weapon: The Rhetorical Diplomacy of Dwight D. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2006).

3 Memorandum of Conversation, 21 October 1955, Dulles Papers: Israeli Relations, 1951–57 (4), DDEL.

4 Diary, 13 March 1956, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, DDE Diary Series: March 1956 Diary, DDEL; Letter from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Dillon Anderson, 30 July 1957, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, DDE Diaries: July 1957, DDE Dictation DDEL; Memorandum of Conversation between John Foster Dulles and Abba Eban, 26 October 1954, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower: Dulles Series, October 1954, DDEL.

Eisenhower and Dulles agreed that Harry Truman's administration had woefully mishandled the Middle East. By their definition, Truman's decisions in the region were determined by domestic political considerations and 'emotional' ties. Dulles summed up his opinion of Truman's policies:

> We were in the present jam because the past Administration had always dealt with the area from a political standpoint and had tried to meet the wishes of the Zionists in this country and that had created a basic antagonism with the Arabs. That was what the Russians were now capitalizing on.[5]

While Truman maintained friendly relationships with Jewish leaders and expressed sympathy for Zionist goals, Eisenhower, from the outset, resolved that his policies would not be influenced by personal ties or lobbying groups.

To combat the effects of Truman's 'emotional' approach to the region, Eisenhower and Dulles planned to apply rational and detached policies to the problems of the Middle East, emphasizing practical considerations such as oil and security over humanitarian concerns or domestic political factors. As such, Israel seldom received special access or attention in the White House throughout the majority of the 1950s. Eisenhower expressed his desire to serve as impartial broker to the conflict: 'we must be friends with both contestants in that region in order that we can bring them closer together. To take sides could do nothing but to destroy our influence in leading toward a peaceful settlement of one of the most explosive situations in the world today.'[6] Eisenhower's attitude dismayed many of Israel's supporters in the United States, who believed that cultural affinity should be factored into the executive's decisions. Despite persistent lobbying on the part of pro-Israeli constituents, Eisenhower refused to modify his policy, and instead focused on 'mending fences' with Arab governments.[7]

Early in Eisenhower's term, he identified Egypt as a key country to provide leadership and stabilization for the Arab world. A memorandum dated 22 April 1953 reflected Eisenhower's desire to promote Egyptian leadership in the Middle East: 'The whole Arab world must participate in a solution of the [Arab–Israeli conflict]. But Egypt, if she exerts her influence in the right direction and can swing the rest of the Arab world, may well be key to the Israeli question also.'[8] He believed that popularly supported Arab nationalists could prove critical to his administration's plans to stabilize the Middle East and pre-empt Soviet interference. Initially endorsing the Free Officer movement of Muhammad Neguib and then Gamal Abdel Nasser,

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5 Memorandum of Conversation between John Foster Dulles, the Vice President, Secretary Wilson, Mr Hoover, Jr, Secretary Humphrey and Attorney General Brownell, 18 October 1955, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Dulles Series: Israeli Relations, 1951–57, DDEL.

6 DDE Diary, 8 March 1956, Box 13, March 1956 Diary, DDEL.

7 American policies in the Middle East are described in Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (eds), *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford, 1997).

8 DDE to the Acting Secretary of State, 23 April 1953, Dulles Series: April, 1953, DDEL.

Eisenhower believed that nationalist leaders would inevitably recognize the tangible benefits of a pro-Western affiliation. In addition to practical necessities, Eisenhower believed that religion – or religious prohibitions in the Soviet Union – created a natural affinity between the United States and the Arab world: 'I have argued that belief in God should create between them and us the common purpose of opposing atheistic communism.'[9] American officials also understood that by aligning with popularly supported Arab leaders, they could combat Soviet images of Western imperialism.

Key to Eisenhower's approach to Egypt was the belief that a single Arab leader could transcend the political boundaries of the Middle East and pave the way to a comprehensive peace with Israel. In 1953, the State Department proposed offering a 'package deal' to Egypt: extending financial assistance in exchange for Egyptian support for a settlement of the urgent political issues such as Arab–Israeli border disputes.[10] Eisenhower and Dulles believed that solving the Arab–Israeli conflict was a *sine qua non* for establishing a secure and stable Middle East. Thus, they initiated Project Alpha, a secret effort to negotiate between the belligerent states. At the same time, Britain, France and the United States signed the Tripartite Pact, agreeing to withhold arms from the belligerent parties of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Eisenhower maintained his commitment to an arms embargo until he felt the need to counter Soviet moves with military provisions.

In all of Eisenhower's plans – Arab–Israeli peace negotiations, arms control and fostering Arab goodwill – Egypt featured prominently. By contrast, the British-supported Hashemite monarchy in Jordan offered little appeal to Eisenhower. Most American officials viewed Jordan as Britain's political bailiwick, and they expressed reluctance to offer economic or political backing to a regime that seemed to lack indigenous support. Despite Jordan's record of limited co-operation with Israel, and the Hashemites' professed anti-communism, Eisenhower did not consider the kingdom to be an essential part of settling the urgent political problems of the Middle East.

An Artificial State

One can easily understand why Eisenhower's plans for Middle East stability did not prominently feature the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Jordan lacked the nationalist credentials of the popularly based government of Egypt, or even the fundamentalist Islamic monarchy of Saudi Arabia. Great Britain created the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921 from segments of territory deemed of small strategic and economic consequence; the new state lacked indigenous cohesion and identity. When delineating the boundaries of Jordan, the British government did not take into account geographic, economic or political realities, but rather focused on the strategic requirements of the fading British Empire. Winston Churchill offered Abdullah of the Hashemites provisional leadership of Jordan to reduce Britain's military commitment in the Middle East, and the temporary arrangement eventually

9 Letter From President Eisenhower to Dr. Elson, 31 July 1958, DDE Diary, DDE Dictation, July 1958, DDEL.

10 Ibid.

became permanent.[11] Despite the best efforts of Jordanian monarchs, the country remained entirely dependent on British assistance for survival thirty-five years later.[12] Yet during the early years of both Eisenhower's presidency and the reign of King Hussein, Britain's role in Jordan became considerably diminished.

Only a few months following Eisenhower's inauguration, King Hussein bin Talal ascended the throne at the age of 17, gaining the crown after the abdication of his mentally unstable father. The young king's only knowledge of governing derived from a short period of time spent in his grandfather's court; the rest of his training had been administered at British schools. Hussein's lack of expertise and youth led many – including officials in the United States government – to believe that his reign would be brief.[13]

Hussein faced numerous problems as the new ruler of Jordan. Many of the challenges of his grandfather's reign lingered: internal development, border disputes with Israel and economic dependency on Britain. More importantly, Hussein needed to contain political opposition within his country and prove his credentials as a leader. The new king attempted to develop a base of popular support for his monarchy to counterbalance the large population of disgruntled Palestinian refugees who resented his policy of moderate accommodation with Israel. He tried to dispel the notion that he was a young puppet by distancing himself from Britain and the imperialist past that it represented. Yet the kingdom remained entirely dependent upon the British financial subsidy – a paradox that limited Hussein's freedom of action.

Two new factors exacerbated Hussein's problems: Britain's financial disengagement, and the rising popularity of nationalist movements. British policy in the Middle East underwent a distinct transformation in the 1950s, focusing on key oil states in the Gulf while encouraging the United States to take a greater role in protecting oil supply lines to the West. This shift in British policy had a dramatic effect on Jordan and its relationship with other nations. At the same time, the twin tides of nationalism and pan-Arabism posed threats to the Hashemite monarchy. Gamal Abdel Nasser, with his virulent anti-imperialist rhetoric, became an outspoken critic

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11 Information on early Jordanian history can be found in Mary C. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 25–59; Abdullah King of Jordan, *Al-Takmilah: My Memoirs Completed* (New York, 1978); Uriel Dann, *Studies in the History of Transjordan, 1920–1949: The Making of a State* (Boulder, CO, 1984); Joseph Nevo and Ilan Pappé (eds), *Jordan in the Middle East: The Making of a Pivotal State, 1948–1988* (Ilford, 1994); Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan* (New York, 2004); Kamal S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan* (New York, 1993); Robert B. Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein: Jordan in Transition* (New York, 1994); Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan* (New York, 1988) and *The Politics of Partition: King Abdullah, the Zionists and Palestine, 1921–1951* (New York, 1998).

12 Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan*, pp. 60–84.

13 Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, pp. 73–4; Clinton Bailey, *Jordan's Palestinian Challenge, 1948–1983* (Boulder, CO, 1994), p. 11.

of monarchies in the Middle East. Hussein, still thoroughly dependent on Britain, provided an easy target.[14]

American officials, despite any sympathy for Hussein, believed that the fragile dynasty in Jordan was the logical site for another revolution. They did not plan to preserve the monarchy, instead accepting that it would inevitably be transformed by democratic movements. The United States was not economically or politically committed to the territorial integrity of Jordan, and did not view the country as an important part of its overall strategic plan for the Middle East.

Worthwhile Investment?

Despite the government's low opinion of Hussein's monarchy, relations between the United States and Jordan improved dramatically during the 1950s. King Hussein and President Eisenhower formed the beginning of a new partnership between their countries – a partnership that would intensify and endure for several decades. The United States entered this relationship with the intention to prevent communist infiltration in the Middle East, and secondarily to insulate Israel from radical regimes. Simultaneously, Hussein found it expedient to sever his ties with Great Britain – which were a political liability – and accept the patronage of a strong ally willing to provide military and economic aid for his monarchy. The threat of Arab nationalism, which the Eisenhower administration associated with Soviet dominance, proved to be the decisive force bringing the two countries together. In this marriage of convenience, Gamal Abdel Nasser played the unlikely role of matchmaker.

In the few years prior to Suez, King Hussein encountered several challenges from Nasser's nationalist movement. The first challenge came during the regional controversy over the Baghdad Pact. Nasser feared that the pact would enhance Iraqi regional power; he therefore discouraged Arab adherence and portrayed the organization as an imperialist plot. He directly challenged Hussein's popular sovereignty in 1955, when he sent personal envoys to discourage the king from adhering to the pact. Hussein backed down. The young king was no match for the older, more seasoned nationalist leader. In the propaganda war with Nasser, Hussein appeared entirely unarmed.

The Jordanian leader again succumbed to pan-Arab pressure in January of 1956, when Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia urged Hussein to abandon his defensive agreement with Great Britain and offered to replace the British military subsidy of £12 million. Hussein agreed to this new financial arrangement, but years of rivalry and political strife could not be overcome in the name of Arab unity. Saudi Arabia

14 Ron Pundik, *The Struggle For Sovereignty: Relations between Great Britain and Jordan, 1946–1951* (Cambridge, 1994); Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1945–1951* (New York, 1978); P.J. Vatikiotis, *The Middle East: From the End of Empire to the end of the Cold War* (London, 1997); Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain and Egypt, 1945–1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991).

alone provided the promised funding, and Jordan subsequently did not receive enough to replace the British subsidy.[15]

Arab nationalists within the Jordanian military also pressured King Hussein to dismiss the British commander of the Arab Legion, Glubb Pasha, on 1 March 1956. Hussein claimed that the Jordanian army needed to be under Jordanian leadership and that he was attempting to improve the morale of his armed forces. In reality, this move was a response to demands from a group of Jordanian junior officers, ones who would later participate in an abortive coup against the king. Glubb's dismissal irreparably damaged the relationship between Hussein and British officials.

Despite the obvious strain on the Anglo-Jordanian friendship caused by Glubb's dismissal, the British government sought to maintain Western influence in Jordan by encouraging an economic alliance between the United States and the kingdom. British officials recognized that without financial assistance and powerful allies, the monarchy might succumb to a nationalist coup. To the consternation of Whitehall, American officials did not express an interest in supporting the monarchy. When Secretary of State John Foster Dulles spoke with Britain's Ambassador in Washington, Sir Harold Caccia, he stated flatly that the United States would not replace the British subsidy. Caccia reported to his superiors in London:

> He [Dulles] doubted if it represented value for money. In his view, the brutal fact was that Jordan had no justification as a State. This, of course, did not, repeat not, mean that this was the moment to liquidate it. It only meant that before the United States Government took on any commitment, they would like to consider for a moment whether the investment was worthwhile.[16]

In fact, American officials believed that Glubb's dismissal was a part of the inevitable decline of Hussein's regime. At a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC), Secretary of State Dulles expressed his concern that without Glubb's stabilizing influence, Hussein would rapidly lose control of the army. Deputy Chief of Mission Richard Sanger agreed with Dulles, and commented that Hussein had figuratively packed his crown jewels with Glubb's baggage. Dulles did not believe that the kingdom could survive without a British presence, and noted wryly that he 'didn't like to make predictions, but he believed that the young King of Jordan was on his way out'. President Eisenhower's statements demonstrate that he similarly believed that the Jordanian monarchy would somehow make the transition to a democratic form of government. Equally, he hoped that popular Middle East leaders, such as Nasser, would take the initiative in solving some of the volatile issues that plagued the region. In 1954, Eisenhower expressed his desire to extend economic incentives to Egypt, in exchange for co-operation on an Arab–Israeli peace initiative.

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15 Laurie A. Brand, *Jordan's Inter-Arab Relations: The Political Economy of Alliance Making* (New York, 1994), p. 87; Richard B. Parker, 'The United States and King Hussein', in David W. Lesch (ed.), *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment* (1st edn, Boulder, CO, 1996), p. 109; Bailey, *Jordan's Palestinian Challenge*, p. 13.

16 Telegram from Sir Harold Caccia to the Foreign Office, 24 December 1956, TNA, FO 371/121525.

Both Dulles and Eisenhower believed that the future of the Middle East lay with popular democratic governments, not monarchies.[17]

The British were not prepared to abandon their position of influence in the country, although it represented a tremendous financial burden. Out of financial necessity, they increasingly sought assistance from the United States to sustain the Jordanian monarchy. Prime Minister Anthony Eden recognized that the United States was far more interested in the global struggle against the Soviet Union than saving Hussein's skin. He complained to President Eisenhower that the Arab plan to replace the British subsidy was a part of Soviet strategy, and wrote:

> The Russians are behind this whole plan to subvert the country. The Jordanian government also has information that the Russians have offered to pay five years subsidy in advance. In light of all this it becomes increasingly clear that the Saudis, the Russians, the Egyptians and the Syrians are working together. If we don't want to see the whole of the Middle East fall into Communist hands we must first back the friends of the West in Jordan and Iraq.[18]

Jordan's salvation came from an unlikely source: Nasser's failure to meet American expectations. The return of Eisenhower's special Middle East envoy, Robert Anderson, in the spring of 1956, disheartened the President. Anderson reported that Nasser had been 'a complete stumbling block' to his efforts to bring together the Egyptian and Israeli governments.[19] Although Eisenhower supported the notion of Egyptian regional leadership during the early months of his administration, his attitude towards Nasser hardened as Egypt drew closer to the Soviet Union. By March 1956, Eisenhower's hopes that Nasser might adopt an accommodating stance began to fade. He wrote in his diary:

> In any event, we have reached a point where it looks as if Egypt, under Nasser, is going to make no move whatsoever to meet the Israelites [*sic*] in an effort to settle outstanding differences … It would begin to appear that our efforts should be directed toward separating the Saudi Arabians from the Egyptians and concentrating, for the moment at least, in making the former see that their best interest lie with us, not the Egyptians and with the Russians. We would, of course, have to make simultaneously a treaty with Israelites that would protect the territory (possibly this might be done through a statement, but I rather think a treaty would become necessary).
>
> In fact, I know of no reason why we should not make such a treaty with Israel and make similar ones with surrounding countries.
>
> I am certain of one thing. If Egypt finds herself thus isolated from the rest of the Arab world, and with no ally in sight except Soviet Russia, she would very quickly get sick of that prospect and would join us in the search for a just and decent peace in the region.[20]

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17 Record of the 279th meeting of the NSC, 8 March 1956, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, NSC Series: 279th meeting, DDEL; Parker, 'The United States and King Hussein', p. 108.

18 Letter from Prime Minister Anthony Eden to Dwight Eisenhower, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Dulles Series, 16 January 1956, DDEL.

19 DDE Diary, 13 March 1956, Box 13, DDEL.

20 DDE Diary, 8 March 1956, Box 13, DDEL.

Thus, by early 1956, Eisenhower abandoned the notion of promoting Egyptian leadership in the Arab world, and began to focus on isolating Egypt from other Arab states. In addition, he reinforced alliances with other Middle East nations in an effort to bend Nasser to America's will. This effort to isolate and contain Nasser would proliferate in the years after the Suez crisis.

Yet Eisenhower's plan to address Nasser's implacability still did not include a tangible commitment to the Hashemite monarchy. Documents from the State Department indicate that as late as 12 October 1956, US officials accepted the prospect of a partitioned Jordan. The White House anticipated that Jordan would be absorbed by Israel and Iraq, and officials hoped to arrange a peace treaty between Iraq and Israel, thus reinforcing Nasser's isolation. Jordan's demise and Israel's anticipated move into the West Bank did not come to fruition; instead, the Israeli military co-operated with Anglo-French plans to regain the Suez Canal.[21] In a diary entry dated 15 October, Eisenhower wrote: 'At the same time I have Foster's promise to have ready a policy or plan that would guide our action in the event that the dissolution of Jordan would actually take place and thus create a new situation in the world.'[22]

Creating Cold War Camps

The Suez crisis did not initiate a rapid change, epiphany or 'road to Damascus' type of conversion in either Dulles or Eisenhower. It did, however, create circumstances that enhanced Nasser's popularity, his regional political authority, and his potential as a threat to Israeli security. As Dulles and Eisenhower increasingly associated Nasser with Soviet influence in the Middle East, Hussein's value as an anti-communist Western ally improved.[23]

Eisenhower and Dulles found Nasser's profession of positive neutrality to be a green light for communist intervention, despite repeated reassurances from the Egyptian President that he would not welcome Soviet interference in Egypt. Eisenhower, however, firmly believed that world leaders had a clear-cut choice, between democracy and 'Godless Communism': the middle ground of non-alignment was non-existent. The Suez crisis – though technically a military defeat for Nasser – enhanced the Egyptian leader's nationalist credentials, and thus his ability to chart an independent course in world politics. Dulles chafed from Nasser's sense of ingratitude following the Suez crisis. The Secretary of State complained: 'Our actions [at Suez] had enabled Nasser to emerge as a great hero, who seemingly took on the great powers and came out with a victory.' In Dulles's opinion, Nasser would eventually reveal himself as a self-serving autocrat who was willing to sell out to the Soviet Union. In the meantime, the United States could not dismiss the appeal of pan-Arabism, which Dulles compared to an overflowing stream: 'you cannot stand

21 White House Memorandum 'U.S. Opportunities in the Middle East', Dulles Series, October 1956, DDEL.

22 Robert H. Ferrell (ed.), *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York, 1981), p. 132.

23 For monographs on the crisis, see Steven Z. Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez: The Rise of American Power in the Middle East, 1953–1957* (Chicago, IL, 1992); Diane Kunz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991).

in front of it and oppose it frontally, but you must try to keep it in bounds'.[24] To 'keep it in bounds', Dulles attempted to find alternatives to Nasser's populist appeal.

Eisenhower once again re-evaluated his approach to Egypt as a result of the Suez crisis. His plan to isolate Nasser and force him into more accommodating positions failed; instead, the events of Suez afforded the Egyptian president increased authority within the Arab world. The crisis also confirmed Arab suspicions of Western conspiracy: old accusations of Zionist–Imperialist collusion suddenly had substance. Nasser successfully capitalized on these fears to position himself as a champion of nationalism – also as propaganda to attack conservative Arab leaders. Faced with this new reality, Eisenhower had to reform substantially his approach to the region.

Failing effectively to woo Nasser or isolate his regime, Eisenhower sought to strengthen alternative sources of leadership in the Arab world. His response to Nasser's rising popularity was essentially twofold. First, he attempted to identify and promote a rival, anti-communist Arab leader. He initially mused that King Saud of Saudi Arabia could serve as a prospective champion because he controlled the Muslim holy places: 'Saudi Arabians are considered to be the most deeply religious of all the Arab groups. Consequently, the King could be built up, possibly, as a spiritual leader. Once this were accomplished we might begin to urge his right to political leadership.' Eisenhower was convinced that a leader of the Arab world could be 'built up' into a position of prestige and power. He did not acknowledge that Nasser's popularity stemmed from his bold position of neutrality and that Saud had neither the charisma nor the domestic support to serve as an adequate rival.[25]

In addition to seeking a rival for Arab leadership, Eisenhower issued a warning that the United States would not accept overt Soviet interference in the Middle East. In early 1957, Eisenhower and Dulles presented a Middle East Resolution to Congress that eventually became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. The legislation authorized the President to 'use armed forces to assist any such nation or group of nations [in the Middle East] requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism'. The resolution also included provisions for aid to Middle East nations and was a transparent attempt to discourage communist intrusion in the region. While some view the Eisenhower Doctrine as a blank cheque that allowed the President to pursue military operations in the region, Eisenhower chose to interpret the doctrine very strictly. The doctrine exemplified Eisenhower's attempt to influence global politics while using a minimum of force.[26]

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24 Memorandum of Conference with Dwight Eisenhower, 23 July 1958, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, DDE Diary: Staff Memos, July 1958 (1), DDEL; the substantive problems with Eisenhower and Dulles's strident anti-communist rhetoric are described in Chris Tudda, *The Truth is Our Weapon: The Rhetorical Diplomacy of Dwight D. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2007).

25 Dwight D. Eisenhower, diary entry, 28 March 1956, DDE Diary: March 1956 Diary, Papers of Dwight Eisenhower, DDEL; Burton I. Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States: Inter-Arab Rivalry and Superpower Diplomacy* (New York, 1996), p. 25.

26 Nigel John Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 107–8.

The Brave Young King

While Eisenhower sought a new champion of Arab nationalism and issued a warning against Soviet interference, King Hussein provided evidence of his indigenous support and anti-communist credentials during the Zerqa affair of April 1957. The essential details of the Zerqa coup attempt are still somewhat occluded; some Jordanian historians express doubt that a plot really existed. According to King Hussein, a loyal soldier informed him of a conspiracy to overthrow the monarchy: several army officers planned to surround the palace and force the king's abdication while keeping loyalist troops on desert manoeuvres in Zerqa. As the king met with the chief conspirator, Ali Abu Nuwar, Nuwar received a call from Zerqa, an army encampment about thirty miles from Amman. Nuwar's cousin and accomplice in Zerqa reported that the camp was in chaos; fighting had erupted between loyalist ground troops and the junior officers who planned the coup. Hussein overheard the conversation and immediately drove to Zerqa to assure the troops of his safety. There, by his own account, despite the darkness, confusion and flying bullets, he waded into a crowd of loyalists to disprove the rumours of his death.[27] The conspirators fled to Syria, and after a few years, received pardons from the king and returned to Jordan.

The Zerqa affair can be interpreted in several ways. Some Jordanians believe that Hussein exaggerated the threat to his regime in an attempt to obfuscate the fact that he dismissed a popularly elected government, purged the army of Arab nationalists and imposed martial law. Yet the Eisenhower administration viewed Zerqa as evidence of Hussein's viability and leadership potential.[28]

Zerqa also dramatically illustrated Eisenhower's reluctance to use American military power in the Middle East. After word of the plot travelled to London, British officials sent Ambassador Caccia to persuade Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter to take action. Caccia later reported:

> I asked him whether in this situation the Eisenhower doctrine could be deemed to apply. He said in his view, not. The doctrine only applied in the case of external aggression. I asked whether any movement of Syrian troops into Jordan might make a difference. He said once again that he thought it would not, because the doctrine also required that the aggression should be international Communism. I asked whether it was necessary to interpret the doctrine so strictly.[29]

Eisenhower would not interpret his doctrine liberally in order to assist Jordan, even if regime change led to war. The Eisenhower Doctrine, crafted as a warning against Soviet interference in the region, was not intended to defend outdated modes of

27 King Hussein, *Uneasy Lies the Head: An Autobiography* (London, 1962), pp. 165–83; Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, pp. 166–9; Bonnie Saunders, *The United States and Arab Nationalism: The Syrian Case, 1953–1960* (Westport, CT, 1996), p. 58; Bailey, *Jordan's Palestinian Challenge*, p. 13.

28 Theories on Zerqa are derived from interviews with Jordanian historians, who for political reasons prefer to remain anonymous.

29 Telegram from Washington to Foreign Office, 14 April 1957, TNA, FO 371/127896.

government in the Middle East. In fact, the doctrine limited the use of force to highly specific instances, if one interpreted it strictly, as Eisenhower chose to do.

Following Zerqa, however, Eisenhower became convinced of Hussein's indigenous support and leadership potential. At last events had produced a prospective rival to Nasser's regional dominance. When Hussein emerged triumphant, US officials brainstormed to produce strategies for supporting the king. Allen Dulles of the Central Intelligence Agency suggested that Turkish or Iraqi troops could be deployed along the Syrian frontier. Eisenhower moved units of the Sixth Fleet to the Eastern Mediterranean as a show of solidarity, and asked Iraq's King Faisal to be ready to assist Hussein.[30] These actions represented a departure from Eisenhower's previous position, which accepted the principle of regime change in Jordan.

American officials continued to monitor carefully the political atmosphere in Jordan, and Secretary of State Dulles telephoned Eisenhower on 25 April to report that the situation seemed fairly stable and 'any more support from us would be embarrassing'. Eisenhower instructed Dulles to offer Hussein a little encouragement – a temporary pact or a few weapons. Dulles and Eisenhower both expressed admiration for Hussein, and Eisenhower suggested that he be invited for a visit: 'Not if he can't get back in,' Dulles ominously replied.[31] Despite such gloomy assessments, the king emerged from the Zerqa affair with enhanced powers to contain political opposition within his country.

Significantly, Zerqa effected a remarkable transformation on Eisenhower's opinion of the Jordanian monarchy. Due to Zerqa, Hussein gained a reputation in Washington circles as the 'brave young King' who willingly risked his life for his kingdom. Eisenhower's military background emphasized the importance of character and leadership; thus, the king's ostensible personal courage and ability to inspire loyalty in his troops impressed him. Eisenhower expressed his admiration and support to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan at the end of April:

> Right now the young King of Jordan seems to be waging a gallant fight to eject subversive elements from his government and country. Of course whatever support he gets from the West must be carefully handled because he could be ruined if his enemies falsely spread abroad the charge that he is acting as a puppet. He seems to be a courageous young man and I am sure that if he succeeds in establishing a stable government in that country, completely independent of Communist domination, the position of the West will be immeasurably strengthened.[32]

Dulles later spoke with Senate minority leader William Knowland about the situation in Jordan. He explained: 'If he [King Hussein] can stand up against this it will be

30 Letter from Dwight Eisenhower to Camille Chamoun, 25 April 1957, DDE Diary: April 1957, DDEL.

31 Telephone call from John Foster Dulles to President Eisenhower, 25 April 1957, Papers of John Foster Dulles, Telephone Call Series: Memorandum of Telephone Conversations, White House, March 1957 to 30 August 1957, DDEL.

32 Letter from the British Embassy, Washington, DC to R.M. Hadow, Foreign Office, 13 October 1958, TNA, FO 371/134021.

a serious setback to pro-communist elements in Syria and Egypt.'[33] Thus, after the events at Suez and Zerqa, Eisenhower and Dulles abandoned the rhetoric of nationalism – along with debates about the legitimacy of monarchy – preferring to divide the Middle East into pro-Western and pro-Soviet camps.

To aid Hussein in his struggle against the 'red menace', the United States granted Jordan $10 million in aid. When Hussein thanked Eisenhower for his support, he depicted the coup attempt in terms of a communist conspiracy:

> Destructive elements and propagandists of sedition and international Communism have attempted to put an end both to the citadel of the state that we have built and to the pillars of government in order that the country might become the prey of the Communists and the opportunists. When their evil designs became known to us for certain and their bad intentions became clear, we hastened to set matters aright.[34]

The politically astute king recognized the value of exploiting the American–Soviet rivalry, shrewdly putting a communist label on the conspirators. Hussein's professions of anti-communism sufficiently impressed Eisenhower, who became more personally interested in the fate of Jordan. In August, he wrote to John Foster Dulles, requesting that Hussein be provided with a number of tanks that were apparently restricted items, having been officially classified as 'offensive weapons'. Eisenhower expressed his disapproval of this distinction: 'A weapon can probably not be classed as defensive or offensive except upon the basis of the identification of the original aggressor,' he wrote. 'In any event, to be specific, I certainly do not blame King Hussein for wanting some modern tanks.'[35]

The year 1958 would prove to be a decisive one in the Middle East. On 1 February, the weak and politically chaotic Syria joined Egypt to form the United Arab Republic (UAR).[36] The virtual takeover of Syria by Egypt fuelled Western fears that Nasser intended to dominate the entire region and compelled Eisenhower to increase his support for Jordan. Eisenhower worried about Nasser's 'unbridled ambition' and his announced intention to dismember Israel: 'To realize his ambitions he of course relies on Soviet help. As he gets deeper and deeper into debt

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33 Telephone call from Senator William Knowland to John Foster Dulles, 25 April 1957, Dulles Papers, Telephone Calls Series: General, March 1957–30 April 1957, DDEL.

34 The coup instigators – Abdullah al-Tall, Ali Abu Nuwar and Ali al-Hiyari – were eventually permitted to return from their exile in Syria, on the condition that they would no longer become involved in politics; Letter from Dwight Eisenhower to Harold MacMillan, 28 April 1957, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, DDE Diary: April 1957, DDEL; Letter from King Hussein to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 12 May 1957, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, International Series: Jordan (4), DDEL; Briefing Items, 14 August 1957, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, DDE Diaries: August 1957, Memos on Appointments (2), DDEL; Lesch, 'Syria and the United States', in Lesch (ed.), *The Middle East and the United States*, pp. 113, 114; Bailey, *Jordan's Palestinian Challenge*, p. 17; Parker, 'The United States and King Hussein', p. 112.

35 Letter from Dwight Eisenhower to John Foster Dulles, 7 August 1957, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Dulles-Herter Series: August 1957 (2), DDEL.

36 Bailey, *Jordan's Palestinian Challenge*, p. 14; Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser*, p. 143.

to the Kremlin, the great danger is that he will set off an explosion of terrifying proportions,' Eisenhower wrote. In response to the creation of the UAR, Hussein agreed on a similar Iraqi–Jordanian Arab Union. On 12 June 1958, President Eisenhower approved a subsidy of $25 million to meet the entire Jordanian share of the Arab Union budget for the coming year, thus strengthening the American commitment to Jordan. In a cable to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, Eisenhower stated: 'We hope, too, that you will regard this as a further demonstration of our continuing interest in the Arab Union and our determination to do what we can to ensure its success.' For a brief period, the Arab Union appeared to be the only bulwark against Nasserist domination of the entire region.[37]

Reciprocal Power

Thus, during the period 1953–58, an unprecedented change in Jordanian–American relations took place. Jordan – initially perceived as an insignificant piece of territory with a disposable government – became viewed as a bulwark against communism in the Middle East. Hussein's reputation progressed from that of an inexperienced youth to a brave, anti-communist sovereign. As the threat of Nasser's regional dominance intensified, Eisenhower became increasingly interested in the fate of Jordan.

The reciprocal relationship between Jordanian and Egyptian power is fundamental to understanding the political landscape of the Middle East during the Cold War: Nasser's rejection of American pressure proved to be a tremendous, if unexpected, benefit for Hussein's struggling monarchy. Furthermore, Nasser's continued animosity towards Hussein afforded the king additional credibility in the White House as suspicions of Egypt intensified. But the king's anti-communist protestations veiled his pragmatic political stance. While Nasser's overt neutrality angered and alienated American officials, Hussein skilfully manipulated his position to gain additional concessions from the United States. This paradox would sustain Hussein's monarchy for years: as the largest moderate, anti-communist country bordering Israel, the stability of Jordan became increasingly important to the United States. As tensions intensified between the UAR and Israel, the presence of a moderate leader in Jordan became an essential part of American policy. Nasser thus played an important role in initiating the Jordanian–American friendship.

In reality, the contest between Nasser and Hussein had little to do with communism, but rather reflected competing visions of leadership in the Middle East. Nasser described the nature of his rivalry with Hussein at a meeting with Eisenhower in 1960. Most of their discussion centred on the sustained conflict with Israel, but at the close of the meeting, as Nasser rose to depart, Eisenhower stopped him with a direct question: 'What is going to happen in Jordan?' In response, Nasser insisted that Jordan, not the UAR, had gone on the offensive in their

37 Letter from Dwight Eisenhower to Dr Elson, DDE Diaries Box 34, DDE Dictation, July 1958, DDEL; Cable from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Nuri Said, 12 June 1958, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, International File: Jordan (3), DDEL.

propaganda war. Eisenhower retorted that he could not see why the weakest and poorest of the Arab states would attack the UAR – it did not make sense. Nasser replied: 'It is all psychological. The people like Arab unity. Some of them put up my picture and some of them cry "Long live Nasser." He wants them to cry "Long live Hussein." It is all personal.'[38]

38 Confidential briefing memo, 'Gamal Abd al-Nasser', DDE Diaries, Staff Notes, September 1960 (2), DDEL; Memorandum of Conversation, 26 September 1960, DDE Diaries, Staff Notes: September 1960 (2), DDEL.

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Chapter 8

A Reluctant Partner of the US over Suez? Turkey and the Suez Crisis

Ayşegül Sever

Turkey was not a major player in the Suez crisis, but the crisis turned out to be one of those exemplary cases to prove that Turkey, contrary to the well-established view, was not consistently in agreement with the United States on Middle Eastern issues even at the height of the Cold War.[1] Besides, owing to the Suez debacle, Ankara, for the first time, faced a challenge of choosing one Western ally over another, which was incompatible with the Turkish administration's long-held belief in the importance of a compact, homogeneous Western bloc facing the global challenges of the 1950s.

The Suez affair coincided with a period when Turkey's policy towards the Middle East gained a new momentum in the wake of the country's accession to NATO in 1952. Following the rise of the new Turkish Republic in 1923, Ankara's Western-oriented reforms, including the adaptation of the Latin alphabet, the abolition of the Caliphate and secularization of the state system, were not well received in the Arab world. Moreover, in the early decades of the Republic, most Middle Eastern countries were mandated territories or under the influence of European powers, so both Turkey and regional countries failed to establish relations free from Western intervention. Above all, Turkey's recognition of Israel in 1949 caused a good deal of resentment in the Arab world, resulting in serious setbacks in Arab–Turkish relations.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the first indications of Turkey's assuming an active role in the Middle East began with the process of Turkish entry into NATO under the Democrat Party government (1950–60) led by Adnan Menderes, which ended the single-party domination of Turkey in May 1950. Sending troops to Korea largely contributed to Turkey's bid for NATO membership, but Turkey still had to eliminate British opposition to its final accession. Britain seemed very determined to get Turkey into a Middle Eastern defence structure rather than that of the North Atlantic region. In order to undermine British opposition, Ankara promised to assist Britain with its problems in the Middle East, including the Anglo-Egyptian dispute over Suez, before its accession to the Atlantic Alliance. Indeed, in July 1951 Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü told the British Foreign Secretary, Herbert Morrison:

1 For further analysis of Turkey's and the US's divergent approaches to various Middle Eastern crises in the 1950s, see Ayşegül Sever, 'The Compliant Ally? Turkey and the West in the Middle East, 1954–58', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34/2 (1998): 73–90.

> once the security of Turkey is assured by her inclusion in the Atlantic Pact, we will be ready to assume our full share and play the role which falls upon us in concerting with Great Britain, the United States and France in all adequate and effective measures taken in agreement between our four governments.[2]

Therefore, soon after it was invited to join the Alliance on 20 September 1951, Turkey was asked to participate in the declaration of the Middle East Command (MEC) in October 1951. The Command aimed at improving Western standing in the Middle East, especially by means of creating a brand new defence structure with the involvement of leading regional countries. However, it failed to gather Arab support, that of the Egyptians in particular. After taking part in the British-initiated defence projects, namely first the MEC, and subsequently the Middle East Defence Organization (MEDO), Turkey eventually became the promoter of the US-sponsored alignment of Northern Tier countries, which ultimately evolved into the Baghdad Pact, in the wake of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' visit to the Middle East in 1953. During Dulles's tour of the Middle East, the Menderes government expressed its desire to be 'the backbone' of the Northern Tier.[3] With its establishment in 1955, the Baghdad Pact became the cornerstone of Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East.

On the eve of the Suez crisis, the Menderes administration was deeply involved in Middle Eastern affairs through its efforts to attract as many Arab countries as possible to the Pact. After the signature of the Pact of Mutual Co-operation, subsequently known as the Baghdad Pact, with Iraq in February 1955, Turkey committed itself to raise the number of Arab members involved in the organization. Gamal Abdel Nasser's opposition to the Pact had already created ill-feeling in the Menderes administration towards the Egyptian leadership even before the outbreak of the Suez affair. In order to reverse Nasser's anti-pact propaganda, Ankara had been calling for the Americans to be firm with Nasser.

The Menderes government, therefore, welcomed its allies' decision in July 1956 to withdraw their offer to finance the Egyptians' Aswan Dam project. However, Nasser's response to the withdrawal by the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company took the Menderes government, in keeping with its allies, by surprise. As soon as Nasser decided to nationalize the Suez Canal, the Turks reacted unfavourably to his decision, and together with Britain and the US, condemned his unilateral act. Turkey's negative reaction did not in any way indicate that Nasser's nationalization of the Canal posed a serious or acute threat to Turkey's own interests. At that time, the use of the Canal by Turkey could be relinquished easily due to the fact that Turkish ships rarely travelled its length. Therefore, the government's unfavourable reaction to Nasser's act of nationalizing the Canal was largely to do with identifying itself closely with the West in the global context. The Turkish government believed that Egypt's unilateral control of the Canal could lead to Soviet seizure of Suez, posing a serious threat to Western security. In view of this consideration, it had already been supporting the British presence in the Canal for a considerable length of time.

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2 FO to Sir Noel Charles, 4 October 1951, TNA, FO 195/2667.

3 *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1952–54, Volume IX: The Near East and Africa, 1952–54* (Washington, DC, 1986), pp. 139–40.

Before the crisis, Menderes made his government's stand on the issue quite clear by stating that he did not regard the Canal dispute as a bilateral problem between the UK and Egypt, but one which concerned the whole of NATO's strategy. Supporting the British presence in the Canal Zone, Menderes argued:

> the Egyptians could not properly maintain today that the nature of the British position in the Canal Zone is one of imperialism or of merely maintaining British interests. Turkey is convinced that the UK is acting as guardian of an outpost of one of the key positions of the free world.[4]

This was identical to Turkey's reaction to the French presence in Algeria. Seeing itself as a committed member of NATO and also of the Baghdad Pact, the government did not wish to see any security risk emerge stemming from the loss of control of the Canal to any anti-Western force.

Ankara therefore displayed no indecisiveness in siding with Britain and the US in condemning Nasser over the nationalization of the Canal Company. Its next step was to watch its allies from a distance, wondering how they would respond to Nasser's nationalization. It wished them to react to Nasser's action firmly and jointly. Initially, Turkey participated in the diplomatic efforts of its allies. Accordingly, on 16 August 1956 an international conference was held in London in order to search for a solution to the problem in the wake of Nasser's nationalization. Being the signatory of the Constantinople Convention of 1888, Turkey was one of the 22 states which were invited to take part.[5] Turkey attended the conference with a delegation led by Ambassador Nuri Birgi.[6]

Prior to the conference, the Americans had some second thoughts about Turkey's voting behaviour at the conference. It was considered that the Egyptians or their supporters might have made use of Turkey's control over the Straits of the Bosporus and Dardanelles to legitimize Nasser's act of nationalization. They could argue that if a country such as Turkey could govern an international waterway without any need for an international body, why couldn't the Egyptians? It was not clear how seriously the Turks viewed this possibility, but the Americans suspected that this concern pertaining to the Straits might lead Turkey not to vote for the Western resolution at the conference. Despite this reservation, the Americans were pretty sure in their final analysis that their ally would act in line with them because:

1. Turkey is well aware of the role Nasser is playing as a leader of neutralism, to which Turkey is firmly opposed. It is also aware of Egypt's increasing dependence upon the USSR.

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4 Ibid., p. 138.

5 The Suez Canal had been governed under the provisions of the Constantinople Convention. The convention was based on the principle of the freedom of passage. According to Article 1 of the convention, 'the Suez Canal shall always be free and open, in time of war as in time of peace, to every vessel of commerce or of war, without distinction of flag'.

6 Bakanlar Kurulu Kararnamesi, 18 August 1956, TC Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü – Cumhuriyet Arşivi (The General Directorate of Turkish State Archives – Directorate of the Republican Archives [DRA]), 030 18 01/144 70 15.

2. Turkey also knows that Nasser is attempting to undermine the Baghdad Pact.
3. Turkey recognises the importance of free transit of the Canal to NATO as well as to the Baghdad Pact.[7]

In the absence of the Egyptians at the Conference, the regime of the Turkish Straits was not raised as a matter of discussion by any party. Turkish representative Birgi supported and voted in favour of the so-called Dulles Resolution, which recommended that an international body should be set up to govern the Canal, and a new treaty, which would replace the 1888 Convention, should be discussed with the Egyptians. Turkey also took the lead in adding some minor amendments to the Dulles resolution in order to make it more acceptable to Afro-Asian countries, which ensured that Egypt's sovereignty in any resolution to the Canal problem would be safeguarded.[8]

While Turkey was actively participating in the diplomatic procedures, its potential to settle the crisis by military means was also being discussed in British circles. In parallel with their diplomatic efforts, the British were making military plans to use force as a last resort if necessary. In the initial phase of the planning, the Adana airbase in Turkey was considered as one option which might be used for an air operation against Egypt. In a letter to the Foreign Office, P.J. Hudson of the Air Ministry made an enquiry of the Foreign Office concerning the use of Adana by stating:

> One of our problems in planning operation 'Musketeer' is that of finding enough friendly airfields in the Eastern Mediterranean. The aircraft to be based in Turkey would be for most part bombers, and we should require not only agreement to use the airfield during operations but should want to carry out a certain amount of pre-stocking. The stores we should need to position beforehand would consist principally of bombs, special maintenance and operating equipment, spares and possible aviation fuel and oil.[9]

With regard to the use of Adana, the Foreign Office's provisional estimation of Turkey's response to this sort of British approach was negative, therefore it was not keen on consulting with James Bowker, the British Ambassador in Ankara. Nevertheless, following a decision taken at the Cabinet meeting of 11 August 1956, Bowker was asked for his views on the matter of the use of Adana. The reply from the Ambassador endorsed the provisional view of the FO that 'the Turkish government would be averse to a Turkish airfield being used for this purpose'.[10] In his dispatch, Bowker stated that the Turkish reaction to the request for the use of Adana would depend on:

(a) circumstances in which it was decided to act and objective;
(b) attitude of America. I do not think the Turks would agree if America disapproved;

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7 Turkey: Interest in the Suez Canal, 9 August 1956, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, Lot58 D610.

8 Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London, 1991), pp. 196–7.

9 Hudson to Galsworth, 7 August 1956, TNA, FO 371/124043.

10 14 August 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1173.

(c) attitude of Russia. I think it would be difficult to get the Turks to agree if it was likely that Russia would give Egypt active support if force used against her.[11]

Developing his argument, Bowker pointed out that 'The Turks would also, no doubt, be loath to take any action which would align them definitely against the Arab states or which might disrupt the Baghdad Pact'.[12]

There is no evidence to suggest that the British made a direct appeal to the Menderes government with regard to the use of Adana. Even if there was, the idea of making use of the airbase in Adana was very short-lived. The need to secure American endorsement for the use of the base might have been a major factor which led Britain to drop the idea of using Adana in its military campaign.

While military planning was under way on the British side, diplomatic demarches to find a diplomatic solution to the Suez crisis continued. After the failure of the first London conference, a second conference assembled, also in London, on 19 September 1956. Turkey was again represented by Nuri Birgi, and voted for the US-proposed Suez Canal Users' Association with the majority of the participants of the conference. These attempts proved futile, and the British, French and Israelis resorted to collusion to bring about a military solution to the crisis. When British forces landed in the Canal Zone, Turkey faced a dilemma over the differentiated British and US responses to Nasser's nationalization of Suez. Turkey eventually joined the US in demanding British and French withdrawal from the Canal, but this was not out of sympathy towards Nasser or his policies. It seemed that the Turks did not resent Britain's military campaign against Egypt as much as the US. As proof of this, when the US proposed to use the General Assembly instead of the Security Council as a discussion platform for the crisis due to the British and French vetoes, the Turkish delegate at the UN abstained.[13] In addition, since the beginning of the crisis, it was hard to find any favourable word for Nasser in the Turkish press. Therefore, the Turkish call for the British withdrawal from the Canal was a reluctant move which favoured its most important ally, the US, at the expense of Britain. This in turn reflected the fact that the US had taken over British responsibility for backing Turkey militarily and economically since the issuing of the 1947 Truman Doctrine.

That Turkey became not a wholehearted, but a distinctly reluctant, partner of the US throughout the crisis originated mainly from five considerations: first, the opposing views of Egypt and Turkey with regard to the Baghdad Pact; second, Nasser's non-alignment policy *vis-à-vis* Menderes's absolute commitment to the bipolarized world system; third, Menderes's bid for an influential role for Turkey in the Middle East while Nasser's popularity was on the rise; fourth, Turkey's support for Iraq against Egypt, and finally, Nasser's improving relations with the Greeks.[14]

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11 HM's Consul General to FO, 13 August 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1173.

12 Ibid.

13 TBMM Tutanak Dergisi (Records of the Turkish Grand National Assembly), 1954–57, Dönem X, 28 December 1956, col. 340.

14 In addition to these factors, the expulsion of the Turkish Ambassador, Hulusi Tugay, from Cairo after being declared *persona non grata* in January 1954 created resentment in Ankara *vis-à-vis* the new Egyptian administration. The ambassador's open criticism of Nasser's administration on several occasions, and the confiscation of Tugay's wife's property because

Beginning with the Baghdad Pact controversy, Turkey and Egypt's opposing views of the pact played a major role in the coolness in Egyptian–Turkish relations in the 1950s. As the Suez crisis and then the war broke out, Turkey was hardly on good terms with Nasser. After the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1954, Turkey thought that it might be easier to convince the Egyptians to take part in the defence of the Middle East against the Soviets. At the final stages of the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations over the Suez base, the British were able to persuade Nasser to include Turkey in one particular provision of the treaty under which Turkey would be treated along with those Arab countries whose subjection to attack would give the British the right to return to the Canal.[15] This was regarded by the Turkish government as an act of goodwill on Nasser's part. Therefore, the Menderes government launched a friendship campaign towards Egypt. A group of Egyptian journalists was invited to Ankara to attend the national day celebrations on 29 October 1954. Prime Minister Menderes sent a message to Nasser enquiring into the possibility of meeting personally with the Egyptian leader. Moreover, Turkish President Celal Bayar expressed Turkey's satisfaction with the Anglo-Egyptian treaty, and specifically with Turkey's inclusion in the treaty, in his annual speech to Parliament in November 1954.[16] All these were good signs for the rise of mutual understanding between Turkey and Egypt.

Menderes was keen on reaching an understanding with Nasser concerning the proposed defence pact, as he recognized how influential Egypt was in the Arab world. To the disappointment of Menderes, the indications with regard to Egypt's support for the pact would not be encouraging. Just a couple of weeks after the Baghdad Pact was signed with Iraq in February 1955, the Egyptian and Syrian governments declared their decision to sign an alternative defence pact in early March 1955. Nasser took the lead in opposing the Baghdad alignment and discouraging any Arab state from adhering to it. Therefore, Turkey more and more had favoured robust handling of Nasser by the West. For instance, as the Egyptian–Czech arms deal was signed in September 1955, Turkey called on its allies to give a harsh lesson to Nasser. Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu argued that the deal was a clear indication

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of her family connections with the Egyptian royal family, had created a great deal of unease between the ambassador and the Egyptian leadership. In the expelling him, the Egyptians disregarded the accepted norms of international law by withdrawing Ambassador Turgay's diplomatic immunity before he left the country. Despite this, the Menderes government did not make it a big issue, for the sake of improving relations with Egypt in regional politics. The two governments issued a joint communiqué in March 1954, expressing their regret for the incident and affirming their wish to preserve the mutual understanding between the two countries; TBMM Tutanak Dergisi 1950–54 (Records of the Turkish Grand National Assembly), Dönem IX, 24 January 1954, col. 779; B.N. Sehsuvaroğlu, *Hekim Bir Siyasimizin Portresi – Büyükelçi Dr. A. Hulusi Tugay* (Istanbul, 1972), pp. 137–57.

15 The British were entitled to return to the Canal 'in the event of an armed attack by an outside power on Egypt or any country which at the date of signature of the present agreement [is] a party to the treaty of joint defence between Arab League states or on Turkey'; cited in G. Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs* (Ithaca, NY, 1980), p. 527.

16 TBMM Tutanak Dergisi (Records of the Turkish Grand National Assembly) 1950–54, Dönem X, 1 November 1954, col. 8.

of Egypt's integration into the Soviet bloc.[17] The government considered the deal nothing less than the inclusion of Egypt into the Soviet bloc, and called on the British and Americans to concentrate their efforts on attracting more Arab states to the Baghdad Pact in order to isolate the Egyptians in the Arab world. Egypt's persistent opposition to the pact led Menderes to make allegations about the emergence of pro-Soviet tendencies in the Egyptian administration.[18] The government did not hesitate to refer to a private meeting between the Egyptian Ambassador and the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in Ankara as a serious sign of Nasser's pro-Soviet orientation. However, the Menderes government was disappointed with the fact that its allies did not seem very alarmed with the Egyptians' closeness to the Soviets. Ankara was especially disillusioned with the allies' handling of the Egyptian–Czech arms deal. According to the government, Nasser was not punished, but rewarded with financial backing following the arms deal.[19] They thought that this could set a bad example in the area by displaying that opposition to the pact might pay as much, or even more, than being a supporter of it. The decision to finance Nasser's Aswan Dam project added another twist to Turkey's disappointment. At the time, the Turks also had a special reason to feel unhappy about the financial support offered to Nasser because their own request from the Americans for a $300,000,000 loan had been rejected only a short while before.[20] Indeed, from the mid-1950s, Turkey–US economic relations began to face marked vicissitudes.

The Baghdad Pact displayed the deep Egyptian–Turkish divide in the region, but it also strengthened Turkey's understanding of British politics in the area due to Britain's accession to the pact. Turkey did not hesitate to co-operate with Britain in the Baghdad Pact, and called for increasing American commitment to the organization together with Britain. Meanwhile, Turkey failed to understand how strong anti-British, anti-colonial feelings were in the region. This was mainly a result of Turkey's having no colonial past. Turkey appreciated Britain's membership of the pact, while the US dragged its feet over adhering.

Turkish–Egyptian perceptions of the bipolarized world order increasingly caused controversy in their respective Middle Eastern policies, and became especially evident in the historic meeting of Afro-Asian countries at Bandung in April 1955. Turkish leaders found Nasser's resistance to the pact pointless since they regarded his idea of following a neutralist foreign policy in a bipolarized world unrealistic. In contrast with Nasser's statements in favour of neutralism, the head of the Turkish delegation in Bandung, Turkish Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, tried to prove the point that at the height of the Cold War, trying to pursue a neutralist foreign policy was very risky for the welfare of the countries of Africa and Asia.[21] Thus, the leaders of the two countries had been pursuing and promoting policies in the Middle East which were incompatible. While Nasser was trying to reduce his country's

17 Ankara to FO, 14 October 1955, TNA, FO 371/115524.

18 Bowker to Shuckburgh, 14 February 1955, TNA, FO 371/115461.

19 Stewart to Wright, 19 March 1956, TNA, FO 371/121272.

20 19 June 1955, NARA, RG 59, Central-Decimal File, 782.00(W)/1–555.

21 S. Günver, *Fatin Rüştü Zorlu'nun Hikayesi* (Ankara, 1985), pp. 52–4; Z. Kuneralp, *Sadece Diplomat* (Istanbul, 1981), pp. 107–13.

dependence on the West, Turkey, on the other hand, was keen on strengthening its ties and promoting Western policies in the area. Unlike Turkey, Egypt was not preoccupied with the Soviet threat. Nasser's main concern was Israel.

At the time when Egypt was willing to establish itself as the leader of the Arab world, Turkey was promoting itself as a major player in Middle Eastern politics. Turkey's assumption of an active role in the region coincided with its increasing commitment to the West. As a result, Turkey by and large was perceived as the promoter of Western interests rather than an indigenous player in the area. This also became a stumbling block to any serious improvement in Turkish–Egyptian relations.

The Turkish government was not only assuming an influential role itself, but also backing Iraq in the historic leadership contest between the Iraqis and the Egyptians in the Arab world. Unlike the troublesome relations between Nasser and Menderes, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Said and Premier Menderes developed a very close relationship which became an important incentive for the conclusion of the Baghdad Pact between Turkey and Iraq. Nuri was the representative of the ex-Ottoman generation. He studied at the Military Academy in Istanbul, spoke very good Turkish, but he did not remember his past experience with the Ottomans particularly favourably.[22] Nevertheless, his firm commitment to have a good relationship with the West, and Menderes's personal involvement with the Iraqi premier, overshadowed Nuri's distrust of the Turks, and he worked side by side with the Turkish leadership for the establishment of the Baghdad Pact. In the so-called Arab cold war, Nasser's Egypt and Iraq, the only Arab member of the Baghdad Pact, presented the opposing leaderships of the divided Arab world. In this competition, Ankara did not hesitate to align with Iraq. Turkey's favouritism towards Iraq was to be criticized by Nasser in his talks with Turkish diplomats on a number of occasions.[23]

Finally, the Turkish government was beginning to feel uncomfortable with the improvement recorded in Egyptian–Greek relations. In March 1955, the Greeks were assured by Nasser that Egypt would support them in their dispute with the Turks over Cyprus.[24] On the other hand, although the interests of Greece in the Suez Canal were similar to those of other ship-owning states, the Greeks declined the British invitation to participate in the Suez conference in London and made it clear that their sympathies lay with Nasser throughout the crisis. At the time, since the Greeks took the Cyprus issue to the United Nations, Arab support for Cyprus at the UN was critical from the Greek standpoint.

In view of all these considerations, if Turkey had had no close strategic commitments to the Americans at the time, the Menderes government could have easily remained indifferent or non-committal to the American call for Anglo-French withdrawal from Suez following military action towards the end of 1956. The Suez crisis therefore indicated that multifaceted or seemingly cordial relations between

22 W.J. Gallman, *Iraq Under General Nuri: My Recollections of Nuri al-Said* (Baltimore, MD, 1964), pp. 9–15.

23 Kahire Büyükelçisinin Nasır ile mülakatı, DRA, 25 March 1958, 030 01 /127 827 3.

24 E. Hatzivasiliou, 'The Suez Crisis, Cyprus and Greek Foreign Policy, 1956: A View From the British Archives', *Balkan Studies*, 30/1 (1989): 118; Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956* (London, 1978), p. 154.

Ankara and Washington in various fields could not guarantee full-fledged partnership in regional crises, even during the Cold War years.

Turkey did not play a major role in the crisis, but was closely affected by its consequences. Having an alignment with Britain put all the members of the Baghdad Pact, including Turkey, under severe strain. Regardless of its low profile in the Suez affair, Ankara was very active in limiting the adverse effects of it on the Baghdad Pact, especially with respect to securing the continuity of Iraq's membership of the organization. Although it reluctantly sided with US, it could not escape being condemned by the Arabs because of its alignment with Britain. Turkey's efforts to bolster the Baghdad Pact were to gain momentum in the wake of the crisis. In order to rescue the Pact, the four regional members met at an extraordinary meeting in Tehran on 5–8 November in the absence of Britain. Referring to the Tehran meeting, Waldemar Gallman, the American Ambassador to Iraq, described Menderes as having a 'calm bearing'.[25] Menderes called his allies to see that 'the Baghdad Pact without Britain was meaningless and to deal objectively with the problem of how to preserve and strengthen it in the present situation'.[26] Initially, Menderes's efforts regarding the continuity of Britain's membership of the pact seemed to have paid off. The communiqué published at the end of the conference refrained from condemning Britain and France, and confined itself to condemning Israeli aggression, requesting the withdrawal of British and French forces from Egyptian territory and demanding the release of the Egyptian prisoners.[27] It was not included in the communiqué, but all the participants demanded immediate American accession to the pact to lessen the strain on the organization.[28] Menderes returned to Ankara satisfied with the outcome of the Tehran conference, but this was short-lived.

Soon after the Tehran meeting, the Iraqi premier, in the face of growing unrest in his country, was forced to publish a communiqué on 9 November 1956 declaring his government's decision to limit its contacts with the Baghdad Pact to the three Muslim states. In order to prevent the Iraqi leadership going further than publishing the communiqué, the three other Muslim members of the pact rushed to Baghdad to ensure Iraq's continuing membership of the organization. The participating leaders, Menderes in particular, pressed Nuri hard to be courageous *vis-à-vis* increasing turmoil in Iraq. In doing so, he played a recognizable part in securing the continuity of Iraq's membership of the pact. In addition to this, he also did his best to guarantee Nuri's governing position in Iraq for the time being.[29] Ankara, therefore, along with Baghdad, was eventually compelled to suspend Britain's participation in the pact meetings. Apart from seeking to rescue the pact, Ankara took a symbolic step by reducing its representation in Israel from ambassadorship to ministerial level. However, the government made certain that apart from the withdrawal of the minister from Tel Aviv, it was 'business as usual' between the

25 Gallman, *Iraq under General Nuri*, p. 76.

26 Bowker to FO, 10 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/124022.

27 *FRUS, 1955–57, Volume XII: Near East: Iran and Iraq* (Washington, DC, 1991), pp. 318–19.

28 Ibid., pp. 318–20.

29 Baghdad to Ankara, 20 November 1956, DRA, 030 01/127 824 8.

two countries as far as commercial and diplomatic relations were concerned.[30] In concurrence with these steps, Turkey's call for US accession to the Baghdad Pact was desperately accelerated.[31] All of these attempts to safeguard the pact from the adverse impact of the Suez debacle were destined to fail in the long run. Neither the suspension of British attendance at pact meetings, nor Turkey's decision to reduce its representation in Israel, was enough to reverse the fatal impact of Suez on the pact. The Suez crisis eliminated any possibility of empowering the pact with the accession of more Arab states other than Iraq. Even Iraq, the co-founder of the pact, faced a real challenge in maintaining its membership status in the face of the rising anti-Western and pan-Arabist tide after Suez. All the pact members were to be increasingly labelled as aggressors by Nasserists in the area due to their partnership with Britain in the Baghdad Pact.

With the Suez crisis, Turkey came to terms with the reality that the Western bloc members could have their differences, and so-called national interests could overwhelm bloc interests, as was the case with Anglo-American relations over Suez. Turkey preferred to see firm American backing of the British over Suez, but this did not happen. This very situation compelled Turkey to side with the US over Suez. In the aftermath of the 1956 crisis, Turkey itself also began to experience at first hand the diversified interests between the US and itself in the region. This would be quite apparent in the late 1950s. During the 1957 Syrian crisis and the 1958 Iraqi takeover, and more importantly, over Cyprus in the next decade, Turkish–American positions were to be far from identical. Again, in the recent past Turkey disagreed with the US over Iraq and sided with anti-interventionist European opinion regardless of its multifaceted strategic partnership with America. So one might trace US–Turkish differences on Middle Eastern issues back fifty years and underscore Turkey's less critical approach towards Britain's Suez policy than the US as a first tentative example of diverging perceptions of Middle Eastern affairs between Turkey and America.

30 Warren to Secretary of State, 9 December 1956, NARA, RG 58, LOT58 D610, 682.83/1–258.

31 Baghdad to Ankara, 20 November 1956, DRA, 030 01/127 824 8.

Chapter 9

The 1956 Sinai War: A Watershed in the History of the Arab–Israeli Conflict

David Tal

The place of the 1956 war in Israeli historiography was, and still is, quite minor. The war itself was short – the Israelis fought for some 100 hours – and its achievements were short-lived – by March 1957, under the pressure of the great powers, Israel withdrew from the whole of the Sinai. The events that led to the war, and the war itself, are the subject of relatively few studies. It was Moshe Dayan who set the historiographical approach to the war, when he described it as an extended retaliation attack.[1] That approach recurred in the writing of historians, who regarded the 1956 war as the inevitable consequence of the cycle of violence commenced in the aftermath of the 1948 war, with infiltrators, many of them Palestinian refugees whom Israel did not allow to return to their homes, crossing the border to repatriate, visit relatives, harvest fields once belonging to them, or engage in acts of theft, and in the process causing great damage to Israel's economy and from time to time even killing Israeli citizens. Israel responded to these infiltrations with considerable force, sparing no effort to prevent the infiltrators crossing the borders. These actions sparked more violence on the infiltrators' part, which in turn led Israel to increase its violent reactions until the final explosion, the 1956 war.[2]

Students of the Arab–Israeli conflict see the war as a less significant event along the historical line starting in 1948 and culminating in the dramatic 1967 war. In this context, the 1956 war seemed of little importance. To some extent, that judgement is justified. After all, the 1948 conflict was Israel's war of independence, while the 1967 Six Day War utterly changed the face of Israel and the Middle East. Lacking the drama that surrounded the 1948 war or the glory of the June 1967 war, the Suez war is sometimes perceived in Israel as the 'neglected war'. However, this approach conceals the impact the war had on the Arab–Israeli conflict, an impact that exceeded its historiographical bearing. The main argument of this chapter is that Israel went to war, among other things, because it misread Arab, and more particularly Egyptian,

1 Moshe Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* (New York, 1966), p. 5.

2 Benny Morris, *Israel's Borders Wars, 1949–56* (Oxford, 1993), p. 428; Mordechai Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza* (Tel Aviv, 1992), pp. 376–7; Kennett Love, *Suez: The Twice Fought War* (London, 1969), pp. 1–2; Michael B. Oren, *The Origins of the Second Arab–Israel War* (London, 1992), pp. 7–8. For a different approach to the circumstances that led Israel to the war, see David Tal, 'Israel's Way to the 1956 War', *The International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28/1 (1996): 59–81.

intentions towards it. Israel hoped that that the war would place it in a better strategic position *vis-à-vis* the Arab states, but in fact, it only damaged Israel's geo-strategic position, as it further distanced Israel from its neighbours. The war served to confirm Arab suspicions of the continuing threat posed by Israel.

To understand this point, this chapter will explore the roots of Israel's security conception in the early 1950s, and especially the place and role of the 'second round' that the Israelis were sure the Arabs were planning to launch after their defeat in 1948. These assumptions will be contrasted with the prevailing attitude of the Arabs towards Israel until 1956, and thus it will be possible to understand the true meaning and impact of the 1956 war on Israel's relations with its neighbours.

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A mixture of real and imagined security problems shaped Israel's security conception and policy in the inter-war period (1949–56). Israel's security conception was based on the distinction between two kinds of security problem: current and basic. The current security conception related to the security problems Israel had to deal with throughout the inter-war years, which mainly included struggles against infiltrators and over the sovereignty of border areas declared by the armistice agreements with Syria and Egypt as demilitarized. The basic security conception related to the actual preparation for war, the prospects of such a war, and the doctrinal build-up towards it. These two kinds of security problem, which will be elaborated later, were based on premises that were articulated mainly by Israel's founding father, first Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, David Ben-Gurion.[3] While the 1948 war had a strong impact on Ben-Gurion, not all of the premises he inculcated emerged from that experience, and in some respects, the war only strengthened his existing assumptions. The most fundamental premise that Ben-Gurion repeatedly related to was the fact that after 1948, Israel was still under existential threat. Ben-Gurion argued that Israel was surrounded by the Arab world, whose goal was to destroy Israel. He was sure that the Arab leaders had not learnt the lesson from Arab defeat in the 1948 war, and was confident that they would resume the war against Israel at the first possible opportunity. The Israeli leadership argued constantly that the Arab leaders intended to resume the fighting against Israel, a threat that became known as the 'second round'. There were two reasons for this: first, the Arab governments and armies that failed in 1948 would seek an opportunity to recover their dignity in the aftermath of their humiliating defeat in the Palestine campaign. Second, despite the fact that the four Arab governments neighbouring Israel signed a truce during 1949, they, in keeping with the rest of the Arab world, did not really accept Israel's right to exist in the region, and still sought to undo the foundation of Israel once they could. Right now, argued Ben-Gurion in 1949, the Arab states were too weak to resume the fighting against Israel – too weak and too divided, and it was that division that contributed to the Israeli success in the 1948 war. However, 'what exists today

3 The accurate translation of Ben-Gurion's position, besides that of Prime Minister, is Minister of Security. I will use the term 'Minister of Defence' in this chapter as it more familiar to Western readers.

may not exist tomorrow. A fragile and destabilized regime could be replaced by a solid and strong regime', the way it happened in Turkey, where Atatürk restored the devastated Turkish state, making it a modern and strong country. Such a leader might also rise in the Arab world, uniting the Arab states under his leadership. One of his missions, Ben-Gurion feared, would be leading a unified Arab army to war against Israel. The goal of the leader and of his campaign, argued Ben-Gurion, would be not only politicide – bringing an end to Israel's political independence – but also genocide – the physical extermination of the Jews in Israel:

> We should not say that what happened in Europe to six million Jews cannot happen to the 600,000 Jews living in Israel … No one among us should pretend to assume that the annihilation of the Jewish community in Israel is impossible. We should not disregard the fact that among our Arab friends such an ambition exists. Their leaders … see such a solution as the only possible solution to the Palestine problem, since they see no possibility that Israel would become an Arab state, as they assume – and they are probably right about that – that an Arab state could not be established with a third of its population Jews.[4]

Ben-Gurion found no comfort in the fact that the 1948 war experience did not support his fears about actual genocide. In the few cases where Arab forces occupied Israel settlements, their occupants – civilians and military-men – were not slaughtered but taken into captivity. This happened in May 1948, when the Jordanian Legion occupied three Jewish settlements in Gush Etzion, south of Jerusalem. The residents of the villages were taken into captivity and returned to Israel after the war.[5] Nitsanim was another example – occupied by the Egyptian army in June 1948, the Egyptians captured some 150 civilians and soldiers, and took them into captivity, releasing them after the war.[6]

The apparent danger of an imminent Arab attack on Israel was even greater considering the discrepancy in demography and geography between Israel and the Arab world. 'We are few,' argued Ben-Gurion, 'and we have to stand against the many. We will remain few even if the immigration [to Israel] is increased with the years.' These words related to the fact that there were about one million citizens in 1950s Israel, as against more than 70 million Arabs in the whole region.[7] This gap remained in force throughout these years, and even widened in favour of the Arabs due to the higher birth rate in Arab society. This meant, of course, that the Arabs could assemble a military force far larger than any Israel could, and the Arabs could sustain losses among its soldiers to an extent that Israel could not. Whilst the demographic mathematics indeed played to Israel's disadvantage, Ben-Gurion disregarded, and

4 Ben-Gurion Diary (BGD), entries for 1 May 1950, 23 October 1950, Ben-Gurion archives (BGA); David Ben-Gurion, *Vision and Path I* (Tel Aviv, 1962), pp. 93–4, 122–3, 306; David Ben-Gurion, *Uniqueness and Destination* (Tel Aviv, 1971), pp. 16–17, 79, 213.

5 A fourth village was stormed by Palestinians, and here the Jewish residents were slaughtered by their assailants. Indeed, the Jewish–Palestinian struggle was on a whole much more brutal than the Arab–Israeli wars.

6 David Tal, *War in Palestine 1948: Strategy and Diplomacy* (London, 2004), pp. 188–9.

7 David Ben-Gurion, *Army and Security* (Tel Aviv, 1955), p. 276.

not unintentionally, the cultural and educational gap existing between Israel and its Arab neighbours – a gap that allowed Israel actually to mobilize most of its citizens within the age of conscription in a way that the Arabs were unable to. That gap was demonstrated during the 1948 war, when in the summer of 1948 Israel had some 70,000 soldiers in the field, as against less than 50,000 troops on the Arab side.[8] At least for the foreseeable future, therefore, the Israeli army enjoyed numerical superiority over the Arab military forces.

Geography also played to Arab advantage. Compared with the geographical extent of the Arab world, Israel was just a small dot on the map. Geography and demography therefore made it possible for the Arabs to sustain an unlimited number of military defeats, whereas for Israel, for the same reasons, the first defeat would also be the final one.[9] Before 1967, Israel also lacked strategic depth. In some places, the distance from the border with Jordan to the Mediterranean, for example, was just a few kilometres – and that was the area where the majority of Israel's population lived. Jerusalem was an enclave within a Jordanian-controlled territory, and the road to Jerusalem was also controlled by the Jordanians. Tel Aviv was located about 60 kilometres north of the Gaza Strip, and less than that from the Jordanian border. This meant that Israel could afford neither to sustain an Arab surprise attack nor suffer even a minor loss of territory, as due to Israel's small size, either eventuality would be critical. This problem was more acute because of the likely international response to such a contingency: one lesson that Ben-Gurion had learnt from the first Arab–Israeli war was that the United Nations would interfere fairly rapidly to stop hostilities, which might happen before Israel could regain territory lost in an Arab first strike.[10]

However, the second round threat was amorphous and intangible, and was discussed as such. In concrete terms, the estimation in the defence establishment and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) during the years 1950–55 was that the Arabs had no concrete intention and plans to go to war against Israel. The Minister of Defence, David Ben-Gurion, assumed in 1952 that there was no danger of war at least until 1954, and the IDF Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan, claimed in 1954 that war was not expected at least for the next ten to fifteen years. The most emphatic evidence of this sense of security was Dayan's decision in 1954 to dissolve the Southern Command, which was at that time considered redundant.[11]

While the concrete threat of war seemed remote, Israel had to deal with disturbing current security problems throughout that period. There were two major issues preoccupying the IDF and Israel during these years. The first was the struggle over two demilitarized zones along Israel's borders with Syria and Egypt. The problem in both cases was similar: the areas were declared demilitarized by the Armistice

8 Tal, *War in Palestine 1948*, p. 362.

9 Ben-Gurion, *Uniqueness and Destination*, pp. 206–7.

10 Ibid., pp. 214–15, 219–20.

11 BGD, entry for February 23, 1952, BGA; Memorandum of Conversation (Moshe Dayan with Henry Byroade), 16 July 1954, NARA, RG 59, 611/84A/7-1654; Operations Branch: 'Review on the Development of IDF Organization from 1949 to 1955', 16 March 1955, Israel Defence Forces Archive (IDFA), Givataim Israel, 637/56/1.

Agreements between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Egypt. However, Israel and these two Arab states disagreed over the meaning of the term. Israel argued that demilitarization meant that while restrictions were put on the kind and number of weapons and military personnel that could be placed in those areas, Israel still retained sovereignty over the two areas. The Syrian and Egyptian governments argued that the demilitarization provision not only put restrictions on arms and military personnel, but also left unresolved the issue of sovereignty. The debate over this question was conducted most of the time by diplomats or military men negotiating the matter, but from time to time military clashes erupted when Israel acted to implement its sovereignty over the two areas. Whilst Israel acknowledged some rights of the Syrians in the demilitarized zone, it assumed sovereignty in the rest of the area. In the south, Israel rejected Egypt's claims, and imposed its sovereignty on the disputed area by force.[12]

The other problem was infiltration into Israel. The phenomenon was diverse and heterogeneous, as the motive of the infiltrators varied. Many of them were Palestinian refugees who had fled during the 1948 war and sought to return to their homes (illegally, of course), or to retrieve property they had left behind. Some wanted to visit relatives who had remained in what was now the state of Israel, or visit the graves of their forefathers. Others, facing severe economic problems, entered Israel to steal. The infiltrators included inhabitants of the West Bank who 'specialized' in such activity and were organized in gangs. They carried out plundering raids, in some cases as 'contractors' for Arab merchants.[13] The armistice lines with Jordan and Egypt produced infiltrators of another type: individuals who, by the end of the war, found out that their land remained on the other side of what was now a border that they were not allowed to cross. Wishing nevertheless to cultivate their fields, harvest the fruits of their orchards or crops from their fields, they became infiltrators by trying to do so. Another aspect of the same phenomenon were attempts by Arabs in the border areas to seize and till land on the Israeli side, or even to harvest crops sown by Israeli settlers.[14]

A few of the infiltrators from Jordan and the Gaza Strip infiltrated Israel for political reasons. They included Palestinian activists who carried out sabotage and murder raids inside Israel, wishing to maintain constant military tension along the borders, preventing the consolidation of the status quo generated by the armistice lines, and generally keeping the conflict alive.[15] It should be emphasized that this 'political' infiltration represented the lesser part of the phenomenon. It was the Israeli

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12 David Tal, *Israel's Conception of Current Security: Origins and Development, 1949–1956* (Beer Sheve, 1988), pp. 115–36, 209–13.

13 'Infiltrations' (document from the end of 1950), IDFA, 108/52/34; S. Ben-Elkana, head of Minorities branch, Israel Police: 'Survey on the infiltration problem', 8 March 1951, ISA, 2246/51/b. See also BGD, entries for 3 February 1950 and 5 July 1951, BGA.

14 'Infiltrations' (document from the end of 1950), IDFA, 108/52/34; S. Ben-Elkana, head of Minorities Branch, Israel Police: 'Survey on the infiltration problem', 8 March 1951, ISA, 2246/51/b; BGD, entry for 30 September 1949, BGA; J. Baggot Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs* (New York, 1957), pp. 245–6.

15 S. Bruk to Investigation branch, Police HQ, 4 May 1950, ISA, 2181/51/1a; Ya'ari, *Fedayun*, pp. 9–10; Zvi Al-Peleg, *The Grand Mufti* (Tel Aviv, 1989), pp. 126–7.

reaction that superimposed onto the infiltration phenomenon a political dimension, since Israel did not treat them for what they were, but linked them to the broad Arab–Israeli context and to the country's political and security problems. Indeed, Israel refused to relate to the infiltration problem as a civic-criminal one. Whilst contemporaries were well aware of the real nature of the infiltration into Israel, the Israeli government saw it as a security problem, and addressed it as such. Israel ended its war of independence with three major achievements. The first was its ability to survive the attacks of its Arab neighbours, which tried to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. The second achievement was territorial. The Arabs refusal to accept the United Nations Partition Resolution, and the ensuing war led to the expansion of the state of Israel beyond the lines set by the partition resolution. Furthermore, the demographic ratio between Jews and Arabs within this enlarged area improved, from the Jewish point of view, and that was the third accomplishment. The Israel of the 1947 partition resolution was supposed to include about 450,000 Jews and 300,000 Arabs. During the war, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians either fled from their homes or were deported by the IDF, and consequently, within the expanded Israeli territory the ratio had changed to 600,000 Jews as against less than 100,000 Arabs. When this trend was identified, the Israeli leadership viewed it as a major achievement. It soon became a policy cornerstone that under no circumstances should the refugees be permitted to return to the Jewish state.[16]

Israel also adhered to the geographical achievements gained in the war. The Armistice Demarcation Lines (ADL) were considered both by the world and the Arab states as temporary, a situation that led Ben-Gurion to declare in June 1950 that 'Israel ended the war with borders that were different than those set for us … There was objection to the expanded borders, and this objection has not disappeared.'[17] The voices of objection were heard during the war, with the proposal of the UN mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte, who in the summer of 1948 called for the current territorial status quo to replace the partition resolution lines. Bernadotte meant that the territories under Jewish control, which included territories that were not assigned to the Jews, such as the Jerusalem corridor and western Galilee, would be part of the new Jewish state, whilst the southern Negev, which was supposed to be part of Israel according to the partition resolution and was under the control of the invading Egyptian army, should be handed to an Arab country.[18] Israel rejected the idea to trade the Negev for western Galilee, and demanded the inclusion of both areas within Israel on account of its military achievements, and through the rights given to it in accordance with the partition resolution.[19] As the armistice agreements implied an Arab recognition,

16 The Foreign Minister to the Government Members, 10 September 1948, ISA, 2348/21; Foreign Minister Lecture before the Knesset Foreign Affairs Committee, 2 May 1949, ISA 2451/18; Foreign Minister Meeting with the Members of the Palestine Conciliation Committee, 17 August 1949 ISA 2451/1; Protocol of a Meeting in the Foreign Ministry, 31 January 1950, ISA, 4373/14.

17 *The Knesset Annals*, VI, Session 154, June 20, 950.

18 Count Bernadotte to M. Shertok, 27 June 1948, ISA, *Political and Diplomatic Documents, 5/48–9/48*, ed. Gedalya Yogev (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 230–34.

19 'Israel Reply to the United Nations Mediator Proposals', 5 July 1948, ISA, FO/2451/1; Speech of the Foreign Minister, 9 January 1950, ISA, FO/2380.

even if de facto, of its territorial and demographic achievements, Israel felt that the agreements served its interests in the best way. Peace negotiations would lead to the opening up of issues which were, after all, controversial, and hence the state of no war–no peace embodied in the armistice agreements, served best Israel's strategic interests. This was the reason why Israel insisted on the preservation of the armistice regime, and its security policy during the years 1949–55 served that purpose.

However, the damage the infiltrators inflicted upon Israel was quite heavy. The value of the property stolen by the infiltrators is estimated by the mid-1950s to be $2,3000,000.[20] The infiltrator-thieves also murdered civilians, mainly in cases where the settlers interrupted the infiltrators. There was another aspect to the damage sustained by the Israeli settlers along the borders: many of them were new immigrants, who were unfit to deal with the infiltration problem. From 1948 to 1950, 250 new settlements were established, most of them along the borders, and many of them were settled by new immigrants. The government was afraid that the settlers, unable to cope with the infiltrators' threat, would flee their homes, leaving the border area unpopulated. Ben-Gurion was unready to see the infiltration phenomenon for what it was – a civic-criminal act. He interpreted it as a tool in Arab hands to continue the war against Israel by other means. As they were unable to meet Israel in the battlefield, they resorted to indirect modes of hostile action through their tacit support of the infiltrators.[21]

Israel had employed three main means of action in its struggle against the infiltrations: sending messages to the Arab governments though various existing communication channels, taking military preventive measures along the armistice lines, and reprisal attacks. The first and the third measures were directed to the local governments, while the second measure was directed against the infiltrators themselves. As it was the army that was assigned to carry out the second and the third means, its *modus operandi* was set accordingly. That meant that soldiers guarding the border treated any infiltration case as a military/security-related issue, and used the most rigid means to prevent incursions. Men, women, children and elders, whether armed or not, were all treated in the same way: mines were placed in their infiltration paths, and soldiers in ambushes shot at them, all intending to mark the border with blood – the infiltrators' blood – and in that way to stop the infiltrations.[22]

The most familiar method used in the struggle against infiltration was the reprisal attack conducted by Israel against Jordanian and Egyptian targets throughout the years 1949–56. The decision to launch a reprisal attack was made, in most cases,

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20 Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 21.

21 Letter from Levy Eshkol, Director of the Settlement Division, Jewish Agency to Col. I. Prihar, Commander of the Lowland District, 9 January 1951, Central Zionist Archives (CZA), S-15/9786; Letter from R. Doctory, Kfar Azarya to A. Ikar, Division of Society and Security Affairs, Jewish Agency, 26 January 1951, ibid.; Letter from Levy Eshkol, Director of the Settlement Division, Jewish Agency to D. Ben-Gurion, 5 February 1951, ibid.; US Embassy, Tel Aviv Telegram to the Secretary of State, 31 January 1953, NARA, RG 59, 684A85/1-3053.

22 Annual Summary of Activity, 1952, ISA, FO/2428/10; Letter of S. Tawil to J. Tekoa, 27 July 1955, ISA, 2488/1b; Meeting of Mapai Secretariat with the Party's Knesset Members, 18 June 1950, Labour Party Archives (LPA), Beyt Berl, Israel, 1-11-3.

following the murder of an Israeli citizen by infiltrators. There might indeed have been various justifications and hidden functions. However, it is quite clear that regardless of any other possible motives, the direct incentive, goal and purpose was the struggle against the infiltration, and more accurately, against its lethal aspects. Not every assassination was followed by a reprisal attack, but every reprisal attack came after a murderous infiltration incursion. In 1949, infiltrators from Jordan murdered 11 Israeli citizens, and in 1950 another 18. As a result, in each of these years, one reprisal attack was carried out, while in 1951, with the rise in the number of Israelis killed by infiltrators, ten reprisal attacks were launched. In 1952, the numbers decreased, but in 1953, 46 Israeli citizens were murdered, and in response Israeli troops launched more than 20 reprisal attacks against Jordanian targets.[23] The most spectacular attack, which proved to be a crossroad in the history of reprisals, was staged at Qibya. On 12 October 1953, infiltrators murdered a mother and two of her sons at their homes. The attack was the peak of a trend that had been noticeable since April. During these months, infiltrators murdered 29 civilians and two soldiers.[24] Two days later, a large Israeli force attacked the Jordanian village of Qibya. Seventy of the village residences were killed by troops, who demolished the village's houses and shot at their occupants.[25]

The Qibya attack had several repercussions. First, it marked a watershed in the Jordanian attitude towards infiltration. Although the Jordanian government had already tried to prevent infiltration into Israel before the raid, Amman did not put everything at its disposal into the fight against it. Until that event, the Jordanian government rejected Israel's demand that the Legion forces be deployed along the Israeli–Jordanian border, to seal it. The Legion's commander, John B. Glubb, was afraid of both possible friction between Israeli and Jordanian forces and also that putting the small Legion into the West Bank would allow Israel to strangle it, if hostilities erupted. However, following the Qibya attack, more and more Legion forces were deployed in the West Bank, taking an active part in the struggle against the infiltrators.[26] This measure, together with the deployment of Israel's newly formed Border Guard force along the Israeli–Jordanian border, led to a noticeable decrease in the extent of infiltration from Jordan to Israel from 1954, and more significantly, to a fall in the number of Israelis being murdered by infiltrators from Jordan. As against 46 and 57 murdered Israelis in 1952 and 1953 respectively, infiltrators from Jordan murdered only 23 and 11 Israelis in 1954 and 1955 respectively.[27] The area

23 Y. Teqoa to Col. Y. Harkabi, head of Intelligence Branch: 'Infiltration casualties', 22 March 1956, ISA, FO 2404/14.

24 T. Tzvia, Central Command/Intelligence: 'Review of Murder Cases in the Command Sector, February–October, 1953', 21 December 1953, ISA, L/2257/10/m.

25 The Qibya Operation order is quoted in Zeev Drori, 'The Reprisal Attacks policy in the 1950s: The Military and the Escalation Process' (MA dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1988), p. 54.

26 'Jordan's Attitude to the Infiltration', 21 January 1954, ISA, L2257/m/10; Letter from Glubb to the Police Commanders in Nablus, Jerusalem and Hebron, 11 February 1954, NARA, RG 59, 684A.85/2-2254.

27 Letter from Y. Tekoa to Col. Y. Harkaby, 22 March 1956, ISA, FO/2404/14.

where the change was mostly felt was in Israeli reprisal attacks: from September 1954 to September 1956, Israel attacked no targets in Jordan.

Another repercussion was a change of policy within the IDF regarding the targets of the reprisal attacks. In Qibya, nearly 70 civilians were killed, and the attack against a civilian target was neither a coincidence nor a mistake. Israel had deliberately directed its reprisal attacks against civilian targets since this method had first been employed, and indeed, almost all the reprisal attacks that were launched after 1949 were directed against civilians. The IDF high command assumed that the most effective tool to impose pressure on the local government to take action against infiltration was through attacking civilian targets, as such attacks would raise a sharp public reaction that would trigger governmental response. Indeed, the operation order for the Qibya attack was no exception. The forces were instructed 'to attack the village and temporarily occupy it; to demolish houses and to cause maximum casualties among the village residents and by that to encourage them to leave their village'.[28] However, the international reaction to the operation's consequences was overwhelming. The Israeli government denied any responsibility, claiming that vigilantes did it.[29] However, in the aftermath of the Qibya attack, Dayan, the main proponent of the attacks against civilians, admitted that the damage exceeded the benefit. Dayan, at that time the head of the IDF Operations Branch, was sent to New York to assist the Israeli delegation to the United Nations in its diplomatic struggle against the sharp reaction to the Qibya attack. There, he witnessed the great damage that the operation had inflicted on Israel in the international arena, and he admitted regretfully that it would be impossible to continue attacking civilian targets, although he remained convinced that from the strict military point of view, this was the most effective method in the struggle against the infiltrators.[30]

While the situation along the Israeli–Jordanian border stabilized, the Israeli–Egyptian border, mainly along the Gaza Strip, which was the populated area along the joint border, started to heat up. In terms of lethality of infiltrations and severity of reprisal attacks, the border was relatively calm up to 1954. During the years 1949–53, infiltrators from the Egyptian border murdered some half-dozen Israelis every year, and consequently, very few reprisal attacks were carried out.[31] The growing heat in 1954 was the result of clashes between Israeli and Palestinian soldiers who were deployed along the Gaza Strip border. The Palestinians used to shoot at passing Israeli patrols just across the border, and Egyptian and Israeli military officers acted to quell the tension. In early 1955, the officers were close to signing an agreement that would end the clashes, but several events terminated the talks before their conclusion. One was the death sentences announced in Cairo on Israeli agents who had tried to

28 Quoted in Drori, 'The Reprisal Policy', p. 54. The rationale for attacking civilians was given by Moshe Dayan, in an address to the Mapai Secretariat and Members of the Knesset, 18 June 1950, LPA 11-1-3.

29 See, for example, Summary of the Government Meeting, 7/314, 19 October 1953, ISA, G/5433/1400/g.

30 Moshe Dayan, *Milestones* (Tel Aviv, 1976) (in Hebrew), pp. 115, 169.

31 David Tal, 'The Retaliation Attacks', in Beny Michelson et al. (eds), *The Struggle for Israel Security* (Tel Aviv, 1999), p. 73.

plant bombs in American and British installations in July 1954. The agents acted in an attempt to sabotage the recently announced Anglo-Egyptian agreement for the evacuation of the British bases along the Suez Canal. Israel wanted to see the British stay there, as their presence was considered an effective buffer between Israel and Egypt, and through the sabotage campaign, Israel hoped that the British government would announce postponement of the evacuation in light of the apparent unrest in Egypt. The entire affair was a blunder, and the Israeli agents were caught. Two of them were sentenced and put to death in January 1955, as a result of which, the Israeli–Egyptian military talks were suspended.[32]

The tension was aggravated by an Israeli reprisal attack on an Egyptian military barracks on 28 February 1955, in which 40 Egyptian soldiers were killed. The Gaza Operation was just another reprisal attack. A few days before the attack, Egyptian intelligence agents, who had infiltrated Israel, killed an Israeli citizen on their way back to Egypt. Ben-Gurion, who had just resumed his position as Minister of Defence, proposed to carry out a reprisal attack, and Sharett, the Prime Minister, concurred. The chosen target was a military base, as was the practice since the Qibya attack.[33] That said, motives other than the prime one – the response to a murderous infiltrators' incursion – were also present when the decision was made. One was Ben-Gurion's desire to bring a shift in Israel's security policy from the path his successor, Moshe Sharett, had directed it.[34] The signing of the Western-oriented Baghdad Pact and Israeli failure to achieve security guarantees from the United States made Israel determined to make a show of power. Egypt's refusal to allow Israeli ships to pass through the Suez Canal – a policy Israel tested in 1954 and which resulted in the confiscation of a boat that tried to cross the canal and the arrest of its crew – coupled with the death sentences on the Israeli agents who were involved in the 'mishap' in July 1954 provided too great an incentive to attack an Egyptian target.[35]

However, one should not confuse the immediate reason for the attack and the additional intentions that influenced the decision. Simply put, in the face of past experience, it would probably be safe to say that without the murderous attack that triggered it, the Gaza raid would not have been carried out. One thing is certain: for Nasser, the timing of the operation was exceptionally bad. Entangled in internal and external struggles, the damage caused to the prestige of his power base, the army, by the Israeli attack reflected on him too. In 1954, Nasser was involved in a struggle against General Neguib, whom he was trying to replace, and against the British military presence along the Suez Canal. These struggles put him in a precarious position, and the Israeli attack only aggravated this. If that was not enough, then in February 1955 the Baghdad Pact was signed, a pact that challenged Nasser's and

32 Hagai Eshed, *Who Gave the Order?* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 17–32; Moshe Sharett, *Personal Diary* (Tel Aviv, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 689, 697, vol. 3, p. 800.

33 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, vol. 3, p. 800, entry for 27 February 1955; BGD, entry for 3 March 1955, BGA; IDF Operational Activity 1955–1956 (1), Archives of IDF History Department, 56/27.

34 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, vol. 3, p. 742, entry for 20 February 1955.

35 Ibid., p. 816, entry for 6 March 1955; Telegram of the American Ambassador in Israel to the Secretary of State, March 4, 1955, NARA, RG 59, 674/84A/3-455.

Egypt's position as the leader of the Arab world. For all of these reasons Nasser's response to the Israeli retaliation attack was different from the Jordanians'. The latter took the attacks for what they were: a tool in the struggle against the infiltrators, and the Jordanian authorities dealt with the Israeli measures by taking steps to remove the causes of friction. Nasser did understand the context of the Israeli actions, but because of his delicate political situation, internally and externally, he was afraid that the Israeli actions, despite their limited purpose, would destabilize his position. For that reason, his response was more aggressive.[36]

Nasser's immediate response to the Gaza raid was the establishment of a special military unit, the Fedayeen, which he threatened to send on terror missions into Israel were Israeli forces again to attack Egyptian targets as they had done in Gaza. However, at this stage both Israel and Egypt had no intention or plans to wage a war against each other. The Israeli response to what it considered as Egyptian provocations and continued infiltration was aimed at strengthening and imposing the armistice regime, and not to dismantling it. Similarly, Nasser made it clear to his military men that he had no intention to go to war with Israel over the Gaza Strip. One expression of this trend was the resumption of the informal talks between Israeli and Egyptian officers, talks that were carried out until summer 1955.[37] And so, with all the tension built up along the Israeli–Egyptian border, both sides played within the rules: neither side wanted war, and both limited the violence to the border area. One demonstration of this state of affairs was the eruption that took place along the border at the end of August. While Israeli and Egyptian representatives were discussing possibilities to stop the violent clashes, Israeli units attacked an Egyptian border post in the Gaza Strip. The attack was in response to shots fired at an Israeli patrol, but against the order the patrol commander had given. Nasser's response was fierce: he ordered the adjournment of the talks and launched his fedayeen on a one-week spree of murder raids inside Israel. It was a particularly ominous development: the first time a neighbouring Arab state had deliberately sent squads to attack Israelis. Yet Ben-Gurion did not exploit the opportunity. The Israeli response was the same as always: reprisal operations. On the night of 31 August, IDF forces raided the Khan Younes police, and with that the reprisal was over.[38] The Defence Minister continued to believe that Israel should not deviate from the status quo and that the reaction to the violent raids should be reprisals that would induce Egypt to modify its behaviour, but without restructuring the mutual relations between the two countries.

Everything changed on 27 September 1955, when Nasser announced that Egypt had concluded a major arms deal with Czechoslovakia. Egypt would receive 200 modern tanks and 100 jet combat planes. Nasser explained that he bought the

36 Telegram of the American Ambassador in Cairo to the Secretary of State, 1 March 1955, NARA, RG 59, 674/84A/3-155; Nasser's Address to the Graduates of the Egyptian Military Academy, 3 March 1955, NARA, RG 84, CE-GR b/263; Mohamed H. Heikel, *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes* (London, 1986), pp. 66–7.

37 Memorandum by Y. Tekoa to the Foreign Minister, 12 March 1955, ISA, FO/2951/3; David Tal, 'Ben-Gurion, Sharett and Dayan: Confrontation Over the Issue of Preemptive War, 1955', *Cathedra*, 81 (1996): 109–22.

38 Dayan *Milestones*, pp. 151–5; DAG 1/2.2.5.2.0:1, Burns to the UN Secretary-General, 1 September 1955, United Nations Archives, New York.

arms since the Gaza Raid had exposed his army's inferior state compared with the aggressive Israeli army, and his argument is widely accepted by historians.[39] However, the ties between Egypt and the Soviet Union – the deal's true sponsor – antedated February 1955, and it actually consisted of two parts, the first signed in January 1955, a few weeks before Operation Gaza. The context of the deal was Egypt's deteriorating relations with Britain and the refusal by it and the US to equip the Egyptian army with modern arms. The signing of the Baghdad Pact, an act that Nasser justifiably regarded as a measure aiming, among other things, to impair his position in the Arab world, further alienated him from the West. The Soviet Union would not miss the opportunity to put a foot in what was traditionally a Western-dominated area.[40]

The deal dramatically tilted the Israeli–Egyptian balance of arms in favour of the latter. Up to that moment, the assumption in Israel (and the US) was that the IDF enjoyed a slight military advantage over Arab armies. The deal transformed the military balance, as Israel had nothing that even came close to what the Egyptians were about to receive. However, there was more than that. Nasser's pretensions to unify under his banner the Arab world seriously worried Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion attributed Israel's success in withstanding the Arab assault in 1948 to the disunity of the Arab war effort. The conflicting interests and the internal struggles played to Israel's advantage, and prevented a concerted Arab attack, from three fronts, on Israel. The great danger to Israel lay in the emergence of an Atatürk-style Arab leader who would unify the Arab world and lead it against Israel. As early as 1954, Ben-Gurion identified these features in Nasser. He became worried, but as long as the Arab world was militarily inferior to Israel, he did not assume that the danger was close. However, now, with the arms deal that would give Nasser capabilities far exceeding those in Israel's possession, the threat of a pan-Arab leader leading the Arab world against Israel became a threatening possibility.[41]

Nothing in the existing evidence supports Ben-Gurion's conviction that Nasser was planning to use the weapons against Israel. In fact, the whole concept of 'second round' seemed to be baseless. In a book entitled *Arab Attitudes to Israel*, Yeshoshofat Harkabi, who was head of the IDF's Intelligence Branch in the early 1950s, refers to expressions made by Arab leaders indicating Arab objectives in the Arab–Israeli conflict, aiming to prove that the Arab leaders talked explicitly about the destruction of the state of Israel. However, all the statements cited are from the late 1950s to early 1960s.[42] Talking with US Assistant Secretary George C. McGhee in Riyadh in 1950, the Saudi Arabian Assistant Foreign Minister, Shaikh Yusuf Yassin, said:

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39 Keith Kyle, *Suez* (New York, 1991), p. 64; Kenneth Love, *Suez: the Twice Fought War* (New York, 1969), p. 83; Michael Oren, *The Origins of the Second Arab–Israeli War* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp. 120–21.

40 Rami Ginat, *The Soviet Union and Egypt* (London, 1993), pp. 207–19.

41 Ben-Gurion expressed these fears on several occasions, on 27 October 1949 in *Army and Security* (Tel Aviv, 1955), p. 138, and on 18 October 1951, ibid., pp. 289–90. See also Sharett, *Personal Diary*, vol. 4, p. 958. Entry for 24 April 1955; Ben-Gurion speech in a meeting of the executive committee and the trade unions, 5 January 1956, in David Ben-Gurion, *Ma'arechet Sinai* (Tel Aviv, 1959), pp. 54–5.

42 Yehoshofat Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (New York, 1971), pp. 1–13.

'Arabs had no aggressive designs against Israel, but intended to treat that state as if a wall surrounded it.'[43] That was indeed the most common feature characterizing Arab attitudes towards Israel. Egypt would not permit the passage of Israeli ships through the Suez Canal, and the Arab countries imposed an economic boycott on Israel. However, as far as the existing evidence suggests, they did not plan to go to war against Israel. Following the Egyptian–Czech arms deal, Nasser did everything he could to impress upon his (diplomatic) listeners that he had no such intention.[44] Similarly, talking to the US Ambassador in Cairo, Henry Byroade, in November 1955 about the Alpha Plan to bring about an Arab–Israeli peace, Egypt's Foreign Minister, Mahmoud Fawzi, demonstrated hitherto unknown flexibility regarding settlement with Israel. He made no mention of the 1947 partition lines, and when he talked about possible transfer of some of the Israeli Negev to Egypt, he was careful to leave the matter open and negotiable. Byroade's impression was that Egypt was ready and willing to negotiate a settlement with Israel.[45] In the same vein, talking to Eisenhower's special ambassador, Robert Anderson, in January 1956, Nasser mentioned the arms deal only in the context of the implementation of the Baghdad Pact. He made no reference to the Arab–Israeli conflict.[46] As was mentioned above, all the evidence indicates that Nasser was much more concerned with regional issues and the role and place of Egypt in the Middle East *vis-à-vis* the alliances the West was weaving. An armed conflict with Israel did not seem to be on his agenda at that time.

Israel's misconception of its Arab neighbours, and mainly Egyptian intentions towards her, reached a peak in the Sinai war. The immediate event that led Israel to war was French invitation. When the crisis erupted, with Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, Ben-Gurion and Dayan's instantaneous response was that the event did not concern Israel.[47] However, once the opportunity presented itself, both seized it, Dayan enthusiastically, Ben-Gurion more reserved but still determined. Dayan had preached war against Egypt since 1955, when the Egypt–Israeli border in the Gaza strip heated up. However, at that time Ben-Gurion was still committed to the preservation of the status quo based on the armistice agreements with Egypt, and where Dayan sought to use reprisal attacks as a trigger for war, Ben-Gurion saw the reprisal attacks as a pressure tool, aiming to force Egypt to calm down the border clashes.[48] None the less, as was mentioned above, it all changed with the September 1955 Egyptian–Czech arms deal. Ben-Gurion was now sure that Egypt had the weapons to allow the new hero of pan-Arabism, Nasser, to lead the Arab world to the much-anticipated 'second round' against Israel. For that reason,

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43 Letter of the United States Ambassador, Riyadh, to the Secretary of State, 25 March 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1950*, vol. V (Washington, DC, 1978), p. 817.

44 From Cairo to the Secretary of State, 27 November 1955, NARA, RG 59, 674.84A/11-2755.

45 Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, 17 November 1955, *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XIV (Washington, DC, 1989), pp. 781–3.

46 Robert Anderson to the State department, 19 January 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957*, vol. XV (Washington, DC, 1989), pp. 28–36.

47 BGD, entry for 3 August 1956, BGA; Dayan, *Milestones*, pp. 218–19.

48 Tal, 'Ben-Gurion, Sharett and Dayan', pp. 109–22.

the French invitation provided an opportunity for Israel to launch what was in Ben-Gurion's eyes a pre-emptive war under the auspices of a great power ally.

As much as it is difficult to establish whether Nasser was contemplating a war against Israel or not, nothing in his rhetoric and actions indicated that he had such an objective. He definitely had no such intention in the summer of 1956. Following the nationalization of the canal company, Nasser estimated that the United States, France and Britain would move against him with military force. As to Israel, he dismissed the possibility that it would attack, for two reasons. First, as much as he considered Israel as an aggressive state, he saw no reason for Israel to act because of the nationalization of the Canal, and second, he assumed that Britain would refuse to co-operate with Israel in such an endeavour.[49] That assumption reflected Israel's place in Nasser's world-view at the time. Nasser had two main concerns in those days. The first was his conflict with Britain over the British bases in the Suez Canal. The agreement that was signed between the states on this matter in 1954 permitted Britain to return under certain circumstances, and Nasser was still worried about British plans in this regard. Another disturbing issue was the contest with Iraq over the leading role in the Middle East. As to Israel, Nasser was well aware of the nature of its aggressive acts along the border. Israel made it very clear that it was acting in order to stabilize the armistice lines and to induce Egypt to take harsher measures to enforce the armistice agreement between the two states. Thus, as much as he responded violently to events like the February Gaza raid, Nasser was well aware of the local nature of such an act. Israel's resort to retaliatory attacks in response to border clashes and fatality of Israeli citizens by infiltrators was a well-known practice, which the Egyptians were aware of. For that reason, they did not conceive of the border clashes with Israel and the Israeli attacks as an act aiming to bring the two states to a war, but on the contrary, as a measure aiming to put an end to the border clashes and to the infiltrations from Egypt. That understanding was translated into an operational redeployment of the Egyptian troops in the Sinai. The only armoured division that was still deployed in the peninsula was redeployed along the Suez Canal, continuing a trend of diluting their forces along the Israeli–Egyptian border that had started earlier.[50] Furthermore, when Nasser received reports about the possible implications of an Israeli war against him, he did not hide his surprise: 'Could it be that Israel really wanted war? If so, he could not see why … What is it all about?'[51]

It took Nasser and the Egyptian army high command quite a time to understand that Israel was attacking, and the attack was not yet another limited retaliation. Nasser's reaction to the Israeli attack was somewhat restrained, but his rhetoric had definitely changed. Shortly after the war, he explained to the American Ambassador in Cairo, Henry Byroade, that before the war, 'Egypt was only country in Arab world

49 Yigal Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn, Surprise at Sunset: Egyptian Intelligence Appreciation before the Sinai Campaign, 1956', *Intelligence and National Security*, 5/3 (1990): 10.

50 Ibid., p. 24.

51 Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, 29 October 1956, *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XVI (Washington, DC, 1990), p. 827; <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1955-57v14>.

where people were not particularly interested in Israeli problem. But today popular indifference has given way to hate.'[52] The change was manifested in the growing anti-Israeli rhetoric employed by Nasser in the following years, a kind of rhetoric he did not use before the 1956 war. Now he started explaining how 'Arab unity means the liquidation of Israel' and 'the Arab people will pronounce the death sentence against Israel, namely disappearance'.[53] That kind of rhetoric reflected a state of mind that could explain why Nasser initiated the June 1967 crisis, and even more, it can explain the inflammatory rhetoric he was using during those days of waiting before war erupted on 5 June 1967.

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For Israel, Arab hostility and threatening intentions was a given. It took the Israelis many years to be able not only to see the shades and complexities in the Arab attitude towards Israel, but also to realize that just as the Israelis saw the Arabs as constantly conspiring against them, the Arab leaders and people held the same view towards Israel and its intentions towards the Arabs. The Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956 was nothing other than proof for the Arab leaders and people of that Israeli trait. For Nasser, there was no reason for the Israeli attack whatsoever. The situation along the border with Israel, at least since April 1956, was exceptionally quiet, and in any case, as far as we can tell, Nasser had no aggressive intentions towards Israel. The gap between Nasser's perception of Israel's intentions and Israel's reading of Egyptian intentions can be measured almost in terms of Greek tragedy. Israel's misconception was not devoid of any sense of reality: after all, it was just few years ago that Egyptian troops, Nasser among them, launched a military campaign aiming to prevent the establishment of the state of Israel, and the continuing border clashes and raids required a kind of perception and understanding that most Israelis, including Ben-Gurion, did not possess. It was the tragic set of events that made the Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956 such a significant moment in the history of the Arab–Israeli conflict, as it perpetuated Israel's image as an aggressive and expansionist state whose presence in the region jeopardized the security of its Arab neighbours. It was this perspective that deepened and escalated the conflict, paving the way for the next round, which turned out to be even more fateful.

52 Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, 16 December, 1956, *FRUS, 1955–57, vol.* XVI, p. 1317; <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1955-57v14>.

53 Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel*, pp. 1–13.

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Chapter 10

When Did Nasser Expect War? The Suez Nationalization and its Aftermath in Egypt

Laura M. James

Introduction

Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956 was an iconic moment in modern Egyptian history, but the precise timing and motivation of his decision have long been disputed. The move is often said to have been a snap reaction to the US withdrawal of funding for the Aswan Dam on 19 July. However, this chapter argues that, although there is evidence of two years' advance preparation, the immediate trigger was the precise wording of the US statement withdrawing the promise of funds, which – owing to the intensity of Egyptian perceptions of Western hostility – was seen as a direct attack on the Cairo regime. As the crisis developed in August and September, Nasser ruled out the possibility of war, retaining his initial belief that his enemies would be restrained by external factors. Thus Egypt neglected indications that Israel might attack and ignored Anglo-French preparations. Despite various announcements made for foreign consumption, it does not seem that Nasser genuinely expected a war before hostilities actually began, on 31 October 1956.

Nationalizing the Suez Canal Company

There is a strong historical narrative attached in Egypt to the events of the summer of 1956. President Nasser, having received a tentative offer from the Soviet Union to finance the Aswan High Dam, sceptically ordered his Ambassador to Washington, Ahmed Hussein, to accept all the terms for the loan put forward by the United States, and see what happened.[1] On 19 July, Hussein had a meeting with John Foster Dulles, who announced that the US was withdrawing its offer to help fund the High Dam project (in conjunction with the UK and the World Bank), simultaneously releasing a press statement suggesting the reason was that the enterprise might overload the Egyptian economy.[2] Unsurprised but deeply offended, Nasser reacted a week later

1 For the background to his scepticism, see Laura James, *Nasser at War: Arab Images of the Enemy* (London, 2006), pp. 1–20.

2 Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London, 2003), pp. 127–8.

by nationalizing the Anglo-French-dominated Suez Canal Company in despite of the then-Great Powers, in a dramatic speech at Alexandria on 26 July:

> We shall eliminate the past by regaining our right to the Suez Canal … At this moment as I talk to you some of your Egyptian brethren are proceeding to administer the canal company and to run its affairs.[3]

The narrative is compelling, but regarding the actual Egyptian decision-making processes, it raises more questions than it answers.

The first question concerns the timing of the decision to nationalize the Suez Canal Company. At first sight, the story seems to imply that it was a knee-jerk response to the withdrawal of American funding for the Aswan Dam, although the exact date is unclear. In one book, Nasser's confidant, the journalist Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, claims that Nasser decided to nationalize the Canal Company immediately upon hearing Dulles's statement, as he returned on 19 July from a Non-Aligned Summit in an aeroplane with Nehru; elsewhere, he locates the decision on the morning of 20 July.[4] Nasser himself stated that he did not begin researching the issue until 21 July, making his final determination two days later after various meetings, discussions and studies.[5] However, other sources are unanimous that Nasser made his decision (and performed most of the analysis) alone, at an earlier stage.[6] Abdel Latif Baghdadi, a member of the former Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), was informed on the evening of 21 July, and the RCC as a whole was not consulted until the morning of 24 July, shortly before Nasser met Mahmoud Younis, who was in charge of the Revolutionary Command Council's Technical Division, and gave him a definite order to implement the nationalization in 48 hours' time.[7]

The Cabinet remained in the dark until two hours before the speech, and although 'many of them were very perturbed', Nasser allowed minimal discussion of his decision.[8] Even if we take the earliest date of 19 July, however, it raises difficulties. For one thing, almost all sources (including those on which the established narrative

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3 BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (BBC-SWB): DS5; *Majmū'āt khutab wa tasrīhāt wa bayānāt al-ra'īs jamāl 'abd al-nāsir* (Cairo, Ha'ia al-Isti'lamat), vol. 1, pp. 547–64.

4 Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, *Sphinx and Commissar* (London, 1978), p. 67; M.H. Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents* (London, 1972), pp. 89, 92.

5 Peter Calvocoressi, *Suez: Ten Years After* (London, 1967), p. 44.

6 Heikal, Baghdadi and Fathi Radwan agree on this point; J. Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder, CO, 2002), p. 67; Yigal Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn, Surprise at Sunset', *Intelligence and National Security*, 5/3 (1990): 45; M.H. Heikal, 'Egyptian Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, 56/4 (1978): 714.

7 Abdel Latif Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 1977), p. 318; M. Uruq, *Qirā'a fī awrāq 'alī ṣabrī* (Cairo, 1992), p. 114; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 92; M.H. Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes* (London, 1986), pp. 123–5; Abdel-Hamid Abu-Bakr, *Qanāt al-sūīs wa al-ayām allatī hazzat al-dunīā* (Cairo, 1987) pp. 26–9; author interview with Abdel Hamid Abu-Bakr, Cairo, 7 April 2004 (in English); author interview with Mohammed Fayek, Cairo, 25 March 2004 (in English).

8 Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 93. See also Sayyid Mar'i, 'Political Papers', in S. Ilan Troen and Moshe Shemesh (eds), *The Suez–Sinai Crisis 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal* (London, 1990), pp. 359–61; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 132.

is based) suggest that Nasser sent Ambassador Hussein to the USA to accept the conditions for funding the Aswan Dam in the belief that he would be refused.[9] Under these circumstances, it beggars belief that Nasser would not have planned what to do in the event that he was proved right.[10] Indeed, it seems that Nasser did mention the option of nationalizing the Canal Company to the ambassador at this stage.[11]

Moreover, there is strong evidence that the Egyptian regime had been contemplating the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company over a longer period. In a sense, it had been on the agenda from before the 1952 revolution, at a time when oil industry nationalization was becoming an issue elsewhere in the region.[12] Preparations to manage the Canal were being made as early as 1955, ostensibly for when it reverted to Egypt in 1968.[13] But the assertion of such long-term thinking does not ring true, particularly given the scale of the studies and planning.[14] Work was done on legal and historical justifications for nationalization, as well as practical preparations which might have applied to the expiry of the concession.[15] Thus, there is little credibility to Heikal's claim that Nasser *falsely* suggested he had been planning the move for two years in order to absolve Dulles of blame for provoking the crisis, and so to help him restrain his British and French allies.[16]

Equally, however, there is no evidence that Nasser had a deliberate plan and timetable leading to nationalization in July 1956. Based on suggestions from Baghdadi and Hussein al-Shafei (another RCC member who later became vice-president)

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9 *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955–57, Volume XV: Arab–Israeli Dispute, January 1–July 26, 1956* (Washington, DC, 1989), documents 399 and 484; *FRUS, 1955–57, Volume XVI: Suez Crisis July 26–December 31, 1956* (Washington, DC, 1990), document 31; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 70; Matthew F. Holland, *America and Egypt: From Roosevelt to Eisenhower* (Westport, CT, 1996), p. 98; Calvocoressi, *Suez*, pp. 41–2.

10 Author interviews with Amin Howeidy, Cairo, 27 March and 9 December 2004 (in English).

11 *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XVI, p. 31; Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (London, 1972), p. 139; Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (London, 1971), pp. 191–2.

12 Howeidy Interview; author interview with Hamed Mahmoud, Cairo, 24 March 2004 (in English and Arabic); Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, p. 318; Uruq, *Qirā'a fī awrāq 'alī ṣabrī*, p. 113; M. Fawzi, *Thiwār yūlīyū yitaḥaddithūn* (Cairo, 1987), p. 100. For evidence that Nasser explicitly drew this parallel, see Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 89.

13 Kyle, *Suez*, p. 119. Nasser did make various public statements that he was prepared to wait until the concession expired; 24/7/54, BBC-SWB: 487; 17/11/54, BBC-SWB: 520; Calvocoressi, *Suez*, p. 43.

14 Bodies involved in these preparations from 1955 included the Office of Suez Canal Affairs under Dr Mostafa Hafnawi, the military intelligence establishment, a Foreign Ministry Research Unit and the General Administration of the Armed Forces. Most importantly, there was a secret committee in the Prime Minister's Office working on the issue from the time of the Evacuation Agreement; I. Samd al-Din, M. Said Selim and W. Khadduri, *Kayf yiṣna' al-qarār fī al-waṭan al-'arabiyy* (Cairo, 1980) pp. 86–97; Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, p. 318; Uruq, *Qirā'a fī awrāq 'alī ṣabrī*, p. 113; Tharwat Okasha, *Mudhakkirātī fī al-siyāsa wa al-thaqāfa* (Cairo, 2004), vol. 1 p. 207; Chester Cooper, *The Lion's Last Roar: Suez 1956* (New York, 1978), p. 55; Mahmoud and Fayek Interviews.

15 Kyle, *Suez*, p. 120.

16 Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 133.

that British evacuation sparked the pilot training and intelligence gathering initiatives, Doran argues that the nationalization was deliberately timed to follow the departure of the last British troops from the Canal Zone on 13 June 1956:

> With the British military threat a thing of the past, the Suez Canal Company, the worst symbol of British economic exploitation, hung before Egyptian nationalists like a plum ripe for the picking.[17]

However, although Nasser was probably waiting for a suitable opportunity, it seems that he was 'not in a hurry'.[18] In his speech of 19 June, following the evacuation of the last British soldier, Nasser's final conclusion was relatively mild:

> In regard to Britain, she has fulfilled her obligations under the Evacuation Agreement. Britain had 80,000 troops in the Canal Zone. They have all left. In connection with Britain we have no aggressive aims against them at all.[19]

On 8 June, the Egyptian government had come to a new agreement with the Canal Company, arranging for the continuation of the concession and training of more Egyptian pilots.[20] Thus, the possibility remains open that the timing of the nationalization announcement was in some sense a consequence of the withdrawal of Aswan Dam funding.[21]

The question of timing is crucial to understanding Nasser's reasons for his announcement on 26 July. It is clear from the discussion above that nationalization was on his agenda at some future point, that the issue was closely linked in his mind to the departure of the British, that he no longer expected the United States to fund the Aswan Dam, and that he may even have toyed with the idea of nationalizing the Canal Company as a response. Does this mean that he provoked the July crisis to provide a timely excuse to make his move, as Holland alleges?[22] On the whole, it seems unlikely. There are too many indications of real surprise and anger within the Egyptian regime, and of ad hoc, reactive decision-making between 19 and 26 July.[23] Members of the Egyptian elite were mostly surprised by Nasser's announcement, which cannot therefore be considered an obvious riposte. Abdel Hamid Abubakr recalls that it was 'like a dream', an analogy also used by Sayyid Mar'i, a Cabinet

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17 Michael Doran, *Pan-Arabism before Nasser: Egyptian Power Politics and the Palestine Question* (New York, 1999), p. 108. See also Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, p. 318; S. Imam, *Ḥusayn al-shāfi'i wa asrār thawrat yūlīyū wa ḥukm al-sadāt* (Cairo, 1993), p. 69; Fawzi, *Thiwār yūlīyū*, p. 100.

18 Mahmoud Interview. It has been alleged that his target date was in fact 1960. Samd al-Din et al., *Kayf yiṣna' al-qarār fī al-waṭan al-'arabiyy*, pp. 99–101.

19 BBC-SWB: 683.

20 Kyle, *Suez*, p. 120.

21 Howeidy Interview; Fayek Interview.

22 Holland, *America and Egypt*, p. 101.

23 The British Ambassador saw the move as 'typical of Nasser's opportunism'; TNA, PREM11/1098.

Minister, who experienced the greatest surprise of his life: 'This was not a decision; it was a bombshell – it was more than a bombshell.'[24]

If Dulles's refusal was expected, it can hardly in itself have been the primary motivation for Nasser's sudden nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. Many sources therefore suggest that there was something specific in Dulles's press statement of 19 July that provoked Nasser.[25] Dulles tried to soften the refusal by suggesting that the sole motivation was concern lest the enterprise should overload the Egyptian economy. On 24 July, however, this perceived insult to the Egyptian economy was a major focus of Nasser's speech at Mostorod, in which he promised a proper response to Dulles in two days' time:

> If a shameful clamour, raised in Washington and devoid of all principles of international usage, announces by lies, deceit and delusion that the Egyptian economy is impotent and unstable, I look at them and tell them: 'Die in your rage. You shall not dominate or tyrannise over us.'[26]

Similarly, Byroade reported that Nasser most resented the 'insincere' justifications in terms of both the Egyptian economy and the issue of riparian rights, and the latter came to the fore in his nationalization speech, in which he accused the USA of trying, for its own ends, 'to sow dissension between Egypt and the Sudan'.[27]

Neither of these slights seems in itself a sufficient reason for such a momentous decision as nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. However, it is noteworthy that Nasser's first and angriest reaction to Dulles's statement was different. He interpreted it as a direct attack on his regime 'and an invitation to the people of Egypt to bring it down'.[28] Even as he made his nationalization speech, this issue remained a preoccupation:

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24 Abu-Bakr Interview; Abu-Bakr, *Qanāt al-sūīs wa al-ayām allatī hazzat al-dunīā*, pp. 26–9; Mar'i, 'Political Papers', pp. 359–61. Awed astonishment was an important element in the massive public rejoicing. External observers were also surprised; William J. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Foreign Policy Toward Egypt, 1955–1981* (Albany, NY, 1985), p. 100, fn. 107; Calvocoressi, *Suez*, pp. 41–2; *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XV, documents 467, 502; Douglas Dodds-Parker, *Political Eunuch* (London, 1986), p. 97.

25 Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, p. 318; Calvocoressi, *Suez*, pp. 41–2; Humphrey Trevelyan, *The Middle East in Revolution* (London, 1970), p. 55; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 131. The statement was repeatedly described, in public and in private, as a 'slap in the face' (*ṣaf'a*) to Egypt; Uruq, *Qirā'a fī awrāq 'alī ṣabrī*, p. 114; TNA, PREM11/1098.

26 20 July 1956, BBC-SWB: DS3.

27 BBC-SWB: DS5; *Majmū'āt khutab*, vol. 1 pp. 547–64; *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XV, document 484. Ironically, Dulles's adviser Robert Bowie suggests that the wording of the statement was genuinely intended to soften the refusal; Calvocoressi, *Suez*, p. 41.

28 Nasser to Heikal and Fawzi on the way home from Brioni, quoted in Heikal*, The Cairo Documents*, p. 74. See also Mohammed Abdel-Wahab Sayed-Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy, 1952–1956* (London, 1989), p. 120; R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Egypt under Nasir: A Study in Political Dynamics* (Albany, NY, 1971), pp. 456; Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the US–Israel Alliance* (New York, 2003), p. 42.

> The US Secretary of State addressed the Egyptian people saying that this decision did not involve any change in the cordial relations linking the US Government and the American people with the Egyptian people. In other words: What we are talking about concerns only Gamal Abdel Nasser … This method was quite clear and obvious. We have had many years of experience of it.[29]

This statement needs to be understood in the context of Nasser's existing perceptions of the attitudes of the US and UK towards his regime. Following a sharp deterioration of relations from late 1955, in March 1956, the US government had begun to implement the first stage of the 'Omega' Plan, agreed with the British as a means of pressuring Nasser.[30] They delayed aid to Egypt and provided additional assistance to Baghdad Pact countries in their confrontation with the Arab nationalists. The Egyptians detected this initiative early, with Ali Sabri telling the American Embassy on 1 April that Nasser was 'extremely upset' by fears that the US and UK had 'taken some secret policy decision to destroy' him.[31] Egypt responded by mobilizing its regional support base and stepping up the Arab nationalist rhetoric. By May, in the second, intensified stage of 'Omega', the US began to bolster Saudi Arabia as a rival to Egypt and planned a pro-Iraqi coup in Syria ('Operation Straggle'). In the context of 'Omega', an interpretation of the funding withdrawal as the culmination of a series of attempts to undermine Nasser's rule would scarcely be surprising, and would help to explain the belligerent response.

Is there, then, any evidence to show that such threatening images of his adversaries played a part in Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal Company? They were certainly prominent as he publicly defined the confrontation on 26 July:

> It is a battle against imperialism and the methods and tactics of imperialism… America, the leader of the free world, supports imperialist France in murdering the Algerians in Algeria. Britain also supports her … Israel is America's protégé and gets assistance …[32]

More privately, he complained to the US Ambassador: 'you fellows are out to kill me'.[33] And he told his confidant Heikal on 20 July that Dulles and Eden:

> were deceiving us all the time. They pressed us for peace with Israel, they pressed us for pacts, they pressed us to extend the Suez Canal concession and all they wanted to do was to increase their own influence.[34]

A possible counter-argument might be that, if Nasser was indeed so convinced that the Western powers were hostile and seeking to overthrow him, why did he provide them with a pretext for more overt action? A more detailed consideration of his

29 BBC-SWB: DS5; *Majmū'āt khutab*, vol. 1 pp. 547–64.

30 Ray Takeyh, *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine: The US, Britain and Nasser's Egypt* (London, 2000), p. 117. See also John Kent, *Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East, Part III: 1953–1956* (London, 1998), p. 507.

31 *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XV, document 235.

32 26 July 1956, BBC-SWB: DS5.

33 Mahmoud Fawzi, *Suez 1956: An Egyptian Perspective* (London, 1988), pp. 31–2.

34 Heikal*, The Cairo Documents*, p. 89.

thinking the week before the nationalization, and particularly his estimation of his enemies' capabilities, can help to answer this question. Nasser, using his staff officer training, apparently wrote an 'appreciation of the situation' on the night of 20 July, the gist of which is reproduced by Heikal. This shows quite clearly that Nasser was indeed expecting active hostility from the Western powers. To the extent he believed he might avoid war, he was relying on their inability (due to lack of immediate capability and the global political environment) to attack him openly.[35]

This point becomes clearer when one examines Nasser's perceptions of individual countries. He identified factors restraining the angry Americans, such as domestic elections and international public opinion, so that they could only 'give their blessing under the table'.[36] He therefore made preliminary moves to placate them, focusing his hostile rhetoric more on France and Britain, and trying to win Byroade's sympathy by presenting the nationalization as an alternative to acceptance of Soviet aid for the Dam.[37] Nasser thought the French would react strongly, but although they might eventually participate with others in an operation against Egypt, he believed that they would be hampered by their heavy commitment in Algeria.[38]

Nasser's beliefs about the British reaction are more debatable. Heikal suggests that his appreciation of the situation predicted a violent military reaction (falling short of a full invasion) from Eden.[39] On the other hand, Nasser sometimes seemed surprised by the strength of British fury, and certainly did not behave as though he expected an immediate attack.[40] The key to this apparent contradiction lies in the fact that the appreciation, written on 20 July, assumed the British would have to act immediately if at all, and thus the real possibility of violence would depend 'on how many troops the British have ready for quick intervention'.[41] Nasser therefore delayed his nationalization announcement from 24 July until he had received reports from Cyprus and Malta on British military forces in the area, which convinced him it would take two months for them to assemble a force strong enough to intervene – more than enough time to offset the danger with his political initiatives.[42] Finally, Nasser believed very strongly that Eden would absolutely refuse to allow Israel to

35 M.H. Heikal, *Milaffāt al-sūīs* (Cairo, 1996), pp. 462–4.

36 Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 90–91; Heikal, *Milaffāt*, pp. 462–4. See also Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 122.

37 *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XVI, document 31; TNA, PREM 11/1098; 28 July 1956, BBC-SWB: DS6.

38 Calvocoressi, *Suez*, p. 44; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 91–3; Heikal, *Milaffāt*, pp. 462–4; Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, pp. 319–20; Nutting, *Nasser*, pp. 147–8; Howeidy Interview.

39 Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 90–91; Heikal, *Milaffāt*, pp. 462–4.

40 *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XVI, document 31; Mohieddin Interview; Calvocoressi, *Suez*, p. 44.

41 Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 90–91; Heikal, *Milaffāt*, pp. 462–4.

42 Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 89, 92; Calvocoressi, *Suez*, p. 44; Howeidy Interview. For Maltese confirmation of these contacts, see Henry Frendo, *The Origins of Maltese Statehood: A Case Study of Decolonization in the Mediterranean* (Malta, 1999), p. 39, fn. 3; *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 30 July 1989, 6 February 2000.

participate in any attack, seeing this as an unbreakable 'taboo'.[43] He did wonder briefly whether Israel might 'take the chance alone and attack Syria or Jordan', but took the speculation no further, according her a low priority that was very much in accordance with his existing image.[44]

Did Nasser really believe he might avoid war? According to Heikal, Nasser apparently thought that the danger of intervention would be as high as 80 per cent at the beginning of August, 'decreasing each week through political activities'.[45] However, reports of conversations with Nasser from other regime insiders suggest a higher degree of optimism: 'We don't want war. And we have to avoid it,' he told his aides.[46] On the military side, Sheffy argues that troop deployments at the end of July did not suggest preparations to face a Western operation.[47]

Prelude to War

Nasser's next move in the Suez crisis was not so much an independent decision as a choice to stand by the resolution he had formulated when he first decided on nationalization, and was thus based on an ongoing perception that he had been right in his prior estimations. Between July and October 1956, he held resolutely to the principle of Egyptian control of the Canal, since he had 'made his decision and the matter was closed'.[48] The key Egyptian goal was to gain time to avoid conflict by winning over world opinion, which depended on displaying the maximum possible political flexibility and managing the Canal effectively.[49]

Initially, Nasser showed himself to be relatively open to negotiations addressing the Suez crisis. He even planned to attend the London Conference, until convinced by his Cabinet that it would be undignified and biased, and continued to seek some sort of compromise up to Eden's personal attack of 8 August.[50] But when,

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43 Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, p. 327; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 90–93; Heikal, *Milaffāt*, pp. 462–4. He also thought the US would 'order her not to interfere'; Howeidy Interview.

44 Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 90–91; Heikal, *Milaffāt*, pp. 462–4; Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', p. 12.

45 Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 90–91.

46 Howeidy Interview. One former RCC colleague quotes Nasser as flatly asserting on the telephone: 'There will be no war'; author interview with Khaled Mohieddin, Cairo, 9 April 2004 (in English). See also Mar'i, 'Political Papers', pp. 359–61; Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* (London, 1978), p. 143.

47 Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', p. 20, fn. 53.

48 Mar'i, 'Political Papers', p. 362.

49 Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, p. 327; Troen and Shemesh, *The Suez–Sinai Crisis 1956*, p. 151. Thus, Nasser promised compensation to the shareholders, eventually allowed unwilling employees to give notice, announced he would devote much of the Canal revenue to modernization, and allowed passage to ships refusing to pay dues; Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 134, 142–3, 257; Sayed-Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p. 128.

50 'Our quarrel is not with Egypt, still less with the Arab world; it is with Colonel Nasser,' Eden announced; James Eayrs, *The Commonwealth and Suez: A Documentary Survey* (London, 1964), p. 41; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 101; Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 183–5;

on 3 September, the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, came to Cairo to present the London Conference conclusions to Nasser, the latter did not take kindly to Menzies' private warning that Britain and France were ready to take military action, and rejected the proposals, complaining of 'collective colonialism'.[51] He also roundly rejected the Western idea of a Suez Canal Users' Association (SCUA), in a belligerent speech at Bilbeis on 15 September.[52] Such intransigence over the issue of control of the Canal seemed justified following the developments of the second London Conference, when Britain and France were seen to be increasingly isolated and most nations opposed the use of force, resulting in the 23 September decision to refer the dispute to the UN Security Council. It was at this point, when the danger of war appeared to be receding and he no longer felt himself to be on the defensive, that Nasser decided to negotiate, and made some carefully measured concessions. The decision is usually attributed to economic pressures due to sterling restrictions and the loss of Canal revenue, but world public opinion (especially that of the Arab oil exporters and the non-aligned states headed by India) played an important role.[53] By 13 October, direct private discussions in New York between Foreign Ministers Fawzi, Lloyd and Pineau, in the presence of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold, had produced agreement on 'Six Principles' for a future settlement.[54] The Egyptian strategy appeared to be working.

In this context, the question of whether Nasser came to expect an Anglo-French attack over the course of the summer and autumn remains remarkably difficult to answer. He could hardly have failed to be aware that Britain and France were in belligerent mood, and making co-ordinated martial plans. The tone of the Western

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Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, p. 331. In the end, Nasser sent Ali Sabri to London as a formal observer, and other agents to both London and Washington to test the ground for a settlement less formally; Fawzi, *Suez 1956*, pp. 49–50; Nutting, *Nasser*, p. 151.

51 Mar'i recalls: 'Nasser pointed out to us that he had started the meeting with the intention of reaching a compromise with Menzies … but the latter was arrogant and had provoked Nasser time after time until he had no alternative but to rise from his chair and expel Menzies from his office'; Mar'i, 'Political Papers', p. 363; Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 219–20; W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1991), pp. 185–6; Robert Bowie, 'Eisenhower, Dulles and the Suez Crisis', in Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds), *Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 276–7. By contrast, Menzies himself reported: 'Nasser took this calmly and said he was well aware that he could not assume that forcible measures would not be used'; TNA, PREM 11/1100; Robert Gordon Menzies, *Afternoon Light: Some Memories of Men and Events* (London, 1967), p. 165.

52 He announced that Egypt would 'stand firm' (*taṣumud*) against 'the sabre-rattling of the big powers' such as Britain and France; BBC-SWB: DS47; *Majmū'āt khutab*, vol. 1, p. 590; Nutting, *Nasser*, p. 159.

53 Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson: The Story of Suez* (London, 1967), pp. 74–6, 160; Bowie, 'Eisenhower, Dulles and the Suez Crisis', p. 206.

54 Fawzi offered substantial concessions on a Users' Association and arbitration of disputes, to the extent that Hammarskjold was principally worried about his power to commit the Egyptian government; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 283; Cooper, *The Lion's Last Roar*, pp. 145–6; Stephens, *Nasser*, pp. 220–21.

press was unambiguous.[55] Military movements of the scale required for Operation Musketeer could not be hidden.[56] Warnings were apparently also forthcoming from both the KGB and the CIA.[57] Indeed, in his speech of 12 August, Nasser openly declared that he believed Britain and France intended to attack, since the French leadership 'wants to solve the Algerian problem and the problem of Governments and Cabinets which change every six months', while Britain 'wants to reassure itself that it is "Great Britain"'.[58] However, Nasser's most definite statements that he expected an attack were directed solely at foreign interlocutors, such as Menzies, Byroade and various journalists.[59] These cannot be taken at face value, given the political importance of establishing Egypt in world public opinion as the bewildered victim – and in British official opinion as fully prepared to fight a guerrilla war.

By contrast, many Egyptian insiders suggest that Nasser came to believe that war was increasingly unlikely as the year advanced. Sayyid Mar'i, observing Nasser over the three months following the nationalization, clearly saw 'that the idea of war was not uppermost in his thoughts and that war itself did not enter his plans as a serious possibility'. He understood Nasser's assessment to be that a 'solution to the crisis by peaceful means' was much more probable.[60] Similarly, Nasser was reported by Sir Humphrey Trevelyan on 30 August 'to have estimated the chances of invasion

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55 Indeed, deliberate leaking as part of a 'war of nerves' by the Eden government meant that much of the British press 'was consistently more aggressive and pro-war than was public opinion'. Nasser may have suspected this to be a bluff, however; Tony Shaw, *Eden, Suez and the Mass Media: Propaganda and Persuasion during the Suez Crisis* (London, 1996), pp. 92–4; Jonathan Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis: Reluctant Gamble* (London, 2003), pp. 60, 81–2.

56 Heikal confirms that Nasser knew from several reliable sources that General Keightley was assembling Anglo-French forces in Mediterranean, but thought it unlikely that they would be used; Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 175; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 105.

57 Ibid., p. 99. Heikal adds that Nasser initially thought the reports 'were being planted by the CIA to make Egypt frightened of continuing its attacks on Britain', until they were confirmed by other sources.

58 BBC-SWB: DS18.

59 Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 148; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 222; TNA, FO371/118999; Humphrey Trevelyan, *Public and Private* (London, 1980), p. 79. In mid-October, Nasser told the English journalist Tom Little that no compromise was possible: 'Sir Eden intends to attack me and there is nothing I can do about it'; Calvocoressi, *Suez*, p. 45. Dorril claims that Little was 'a senior MI6 agent' and head of the blown spy ring, and that the Egyptians knowingly fed him with disinformation; Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London, 2000), p. 631.

60 Mar'i, 'Political Papers', pp. 362–3. Other insiders confirm that the Egyptian regime, which had never really anticipated war, saw it as increasingly unlikely, making few substantive military plans; author interview with Ambassador Gamal Naguib, Cairo, 19 April 2004 (in English); Howeidy and Mahmoud Interviews. Heikal does argue that the withdrawal of troops from Sinai that summer constituted a deliberate preparation for hostilities; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 90–91, 105; Heikal, *Milaffāt*, pp. 462–4. However, since the redeployment seems to have been planned as early as June, based on reduced assessments of the Israeli threat and the need for training with new Soviet weapons, it is not clear evidence that Nasser expected an attack; Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', pp. 16–24.

at 10–1 against', and he still seemed 'obdurate and defiant' on 19 September. 'Even the more thoughtful,' the British Ambassador concluded a few days later, 'are at the moment inclined to think that there is no longer any danger of war and that the affair is now virtually over,' securing the domestic position of the Egyptian regime.[61] Given his strong initial preconception that the danger of war would reduce over time, Nasser is likely to have been particularly open to incoming information that carried this implication, such as polls showing opposition to war in Britain, as well as world opinion (expressed, for example, through Nehru's belief in India's ability to mediate a peaceful solution), which led him to conclude that the Suez crisis had:

> become the problem of the whole world, which is defending the freedom for which it has struggled in the face of the use of aggressive force and the policy of force pursued by the big Powers.[62]

There is some indication that in September, the Military High Command, unlike the Egyptian political leadership, might seriously have anticipated a British attack.[63] The 'Egyptian Army Operation Order 1 September 1956 for the Defence of Egypt' stated: 'It is expected that some Western states will carry out hostile actions against Egypt as a result of the Suez nationalisation,' and outlined plans that assumed Egyptian forces would be unable to resist, focusing on delaying battles, retreat and subsequent guerrilla warfare, rather than active defence or counter-attack.[64] 'They probably expect that the Egyptian armed forces would be defeated in a short period,' Trevelyan reported in August, 'and plan, in that case, to disrupt the security forces and Administration and for many of the Free Officers to go underground.'[65]

In any case, there was little foundation for the bravado displayed by General Abdel-Hakim Amer, Nasser's close friend and army chief:

> My confidence regarding the safety of the situation is unbounded … We started our preparation before the President announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal … We shall not be taken by surprise. I can promise you the war against us will not be the picnic some people believe or talk about.[66]

By October, however, especially once the UN negotiations had begun, and even more so when the Six Principles and plans for further negotiations in Geneva had been agreed, the Egyptian leadership virtually ruled out the danger of invasion.[67]

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61 TNA, PREM 11/1100, 1102.

62 12 August 1956, BBC-SWB: DS18. See Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 188, 226; Fayek Interview.

63 Author interview with General Talaat Mosallem, Cairo, 8 December 2004 (in English).

64 Troen and Shemesh, *The Suez–Sinai Crisis 1956*, p. 377. See Amin Howeidy, 'Nasser and the Crisis of 1956', in Louis and Owen (eds), *Suez 1956*, p. 169; A.F. Abu al-Fadl, *Kuntu nā'iban li ra'īs al-muḳḥabarāt* (Cairo, 2001), pp. 103–4.

65 TNA, FO371/118999. Eden minuted the file: 'Tell him to cheer up!' But the Foreign Office failed to pass on the message.

66 3 September 1956, BBC-SWB: DS36.

67 It was felt, by the elite and most Egyptian diplomats, that the crisis had 'burned out' and 'the steam had gone out of the situation'; TNA, PREM 11/1102; Heikal, *The Cairo*

The army reduced its level of alert and resumed training, as concerns over the possibility of Middle East war began to focus on the Israel–Jordan border.[68]

Sayyid Mar'i suggests that the maximum response Nasser anticipated to his nationalization of the Suez Canal Company was a provocation from Israel 'some time later' – which might constitute an indirect Anglo-French attack.[69] In late August, Egyptian Intelligence also speculated that Israel might attack Gaza or Sinai with the agreement of the Western countries.[70] However, this was not echoed in mainstream military sources, which continued either to ignore Israel or to focus on the dangers of subversion and covert action.[71] 'General Orders for the Defence of Egypt' issued on 28 August focused solely on the Canal Zone. The General Order of 1 September does include the single line: 'One should not ignore what action may be taken by Israel in these circumstances.' However, the context suggests that the High Command was still thinking in terms of localized border raids.[72] By early October, the Egyptian intelligence establishment believed that Israel would remain neutral over the Canal nationalization issue, since: 'Many recent broadcasts have emphasized that Israel should not allow itself to be used as a catspaw by the imperialist powers.'[73] Even when, on 24 October, in the context of rising regional tension over the Jordan issue, the Egyptian High Command raised readiness status along the Eastern front for fear of an Israeli attack, there is no evidence of concrete apprehensions. The Sinai sector was not reinforced, there were no other alerts, and Marshal Amer went to visit Jordan and Syria that very day, remaining even beyond 26 October, when readiness in the Aqaba sector was raised to the highest level. In other words, the Israeli threat was still perceived as essentially local.[74]

It seems, therefore, that Nasser thought the military danger was over at the end of October. Foreign Minster Fawzi was working on an Egyptian plan to implement the Six Principles, based on a draft provided by Hammarskjold. Nasser himself considered taking a more personal role in the international drama by attending the follow-up talks in Geneva, originally planned for 29 October – the date, as it turned out, of the Israeli attack, which took the Egyptian military and political establishments entirely by surprise.[75] Although the mobilization of Israeli forces

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Documents, p. 105. See Heikal, *Milaffāt*, p. 825; Nigel J. Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955–59* (London, 1996), p. 92; Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis*, p. 122.

68 Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', pp. 29–32. Amer publicly warned on 18 October that Egypt would intervene if Israel invaded Jordan; BBC-SWB: DS73.

69 Mar'i, 'Political Papers', p. 363.

70 See Howeidy, 'Nasser and the Crisis of 1956', p. 169.

71 Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', pp. 20–21.

72 For example, there was no detail on planned Egyptian responses, the order does not even mention the Sinai and Aqaba sectors, and troops continued to be withdrawn from the former and redeployed in the Canal Zone; Troen and Shemesh, *The Suez–Sinai Crisis 1956*, pp. 152, 377.

73 Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 176; Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', pp. 23–4.

74 Ibid., p. 40.

75 Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 312–13; Mahmoud Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (London, 1981), p. 9; Fayek Interview; Howeidy Interview.

had been noted, the combination of fortuitous circumstances and a deliberate deception plan had convinced most observers that their target was Jordan.[76] That morning, when the new US Ambassador, Raymond Hare, called on Nasser to express Eisenhower's concern and to call for restraint, the 'friendly and relaxed' Egyptian President dismissed the possibility of hostilities and went on to his son's birthday party, where he eventually received the report that Israeli paratroopers were landing near the Mitla Pass in Sinai.[77]

Nasser was at first confused, telling Heikal:

> Something very strange is happening. The Israelis are in Sinai and they are occupying one empty position after another. We have been monitoring closely what's going on, and it looks to us as if all they want to do is to start up sandstorms in the desert.[78]

The initial assumption was that the Israeli attack was a limited border incursion or feint, and the possibility of collusion was never raised. This was entirely consistent with the Egyptian regime's initial images of the scope of Israeli enterprises, the reduced threat from Britain and France, and the impossibility of Western co-operation with Israel.[79] Even by 10.30 p.m., when Nasser, Amer and the other RCC members in the military headquarters realized the raid was on a larger scale than usual, they were still not thinking in terms of an all-out invasion as they ordered that army units should return to Sinai and the air force prepare for action.[80]

On the afternoon of the following day, 30 October, Britain and France presented the Egyptian and Israeli governments with a joint ultimatum, secretly agreed in advance with the latter at Sèvres, demanding that both sides withdraw from the Canal and Egypt 'accept the temporary occupation by Anglo-French forces of key positions at Port Said, Ismailia and Suez'.[81] The Egyptians immediately detected collusion, albeit with 'astonishment bordering on disbelief', since their certainty that Britain would not endanger her Middle East position by aligning with Israel (and that Israel's self-respect as a new state would cause her to avoid the appearance of dependence on the West) had led them to interpret the Israeli attack as making it

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76 The US government seems to have shared this belief as late as 27 October; Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', p. 41; Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 338–9, 345; Chaim Herzog, *The Arab–Israeli Wars* (London, 1982), p. 7.

77 *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XVI, document 408; Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', p. 7; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 105.

78 Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 177. Discounting the possibility of collusion with the Western powers, it was difficult to explain the lack of Israeli concern for air cover; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 352.

79 Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 178; Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', pp. 43–4; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 352.

80 Abdel-Latif Baghdadi, 'Memoirs', in Troen and Shemesh, *The Suez–Sinai Crisis 1956*, p. 337; Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, pp. 335–6; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 106.

81 Eayrs, *The Commonwealth and Suez*, p. 204; Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 358–9. It is worth noting that the concept of a British 'temporary occupation' had immensely negative connotations for Egypt, that exact term having been used in 1882.

less likely that the Western countries could intervene.[82] The Egyptian surprise needs further explanation, however, since the Egyptian regime had been warned of the possibility from several sources, and had ignored all warnings.

The Egyptian Military Attaché in Istanbul predicted an ultimatum followed by a tripartite attack as early as 6 October, but his report was discounted by a military intelligence establishment fixated on the idea of an attack through Libya.[83] A similar suggestion from a Paris friend of Khaled Mohieddin was interpreted as a deliberate false leak aiming to concentrate Egyptian forces in Sinai, away from Alexandria, and other information received by the Paris embassy was not even passed on.[84] Alleged warnings from the CIA and the Jordanian army were disregarded.[85] On the morning of 29 October, there were reports of UK reconnaissance flights over the Canal Zone, but although Nasser was unconvinced by the suggestion that the British might simply be concerned about the safety of their personnel, he did not go on to draw the correct conclusion.[86]

Perhaps the most notable example is that of the Paris Military Attaché, Tharwat Okasha, who was informed of the Sèvres plan by a highly placed French contact on the morning of 27 October, and sent the Press Attaché straight to Cairo to inform Nasser, whom he saw at noon on 29 October:

> He told him that there will be an aggression today by the British, the French and the Israelis … Nasser said to him, 'Oh, this is very strange. Repeat it again.' He repeated it. He told him, 'Look here, my son, Israel, France can do it, but the British cannot at all co-operate with the Israelis. They have dignity, and they will hesitate 100 times to co-operate with the Israelis.' And he did not believe it.[87]

It is clear that the fixity of this image, and its role in filtering incoming information, was a major factor in Egyptian surprise at the Israeli attack and the Anglo-French ultimatum. It may, moreover, have affected the response to the ultimatum, encouraging Nasser to believe that such an irrational policy could only be a bluff. Although the contrary evidence was mounting, the image had still not been called into question.

Nasser's enemies understood he could never have survived acceptance of the ultimatum.[88] That was its purpose. But they also believed that he would not survive

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82 Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 179; Fayek Interview; author interview with Dr Esmat Abdel Magid, Cairo, 20 April 2004 (in English); Howeidy, 'Nasser and the Crisis of 1956', p. 169; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 350. Of course, many Britons also saw the ultimatum as folly; Dodds-Parker, *Political Eunuch*, p. 105; Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: Diaries 1951–56* (London, 1986), p. 362.

83 Troen and Shemesh, *The Suez–Sinai Crisis 1956*, p. 153; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 350.

84 Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, p. 328; Troen and Shemesh, *The Suez–Sinai Crisis 1956*, p. 152; Sheffy, 'Unconcern at Dawn', p. 40; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 106.

85 Wilbur Eveland, *Ropes of Sand: America's Failure in the Middle East* (London, 1980), p. 226; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 351.

86 Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 179.

87 Howeidy Interview. Amin Howeidy claims to have heard the story directly from the press attaché. See also author interview with Dr Tharwat Okasha, Cairo, 18 December 2004 (in English); Kyle, *Suez*, p. 350.

88 Roy Fullick and Geoffrey Powell, *Suez: The Double War* (London, 1990), p. 93.

refusing it. Nasser would have agreed with them in the former case, but the latter may not have seemed such a dangerous option, despite the violent public rhetoric.[89] An actual British attack was still 'something beyond imagination'.[90] Nasser later claimed that they chose to reject the ultimatum at a government meeting that evening because 'British invasion was only a possibility, although we reckoned that the possibility was then 70 percent.'[91] Mar'i suggests more strongly that 'in accordance with his existing political outlook … Nasser did not in any way estimate that this ultimatum was serious'.[92] Baghdadi confirms that Nasser did not take it seriously, believing the aim was to assist Israel by keeping Egyptian troops out of Sinai.[93]

The final proof that the regime was unconvinced by the ultimatum is that, despite making some preparations for an Anglo-French attack, it did not take the obvious step of evacuating the Sinai forces: indeed, Marshal Amer continued to reinforce them, while Nasser stood by.[94] Baghdadi recalls a meeting at HQ on the morning of 31 October:

> When we analysed the course of the war while looking at the maps, we expressed our fear of the possibility that the English and the French would drop forces in the Canal Zone in order to cut off our forces in Sinai. But Gamal [Abdel Nasser] looked upon this as an unlikely possibility …[95]

Nasser had therefore been 'completely relaxed and at his ease' as he delivered a firm rejection of the ultimatum to the British Ambassador.[96]

In consequence, Nasser was once again surprised when informed, on the evening of 31 October, that British and French planes were bombing Cairo, and he 'could not believe it until he stood on the roof of his house and saw … French and British insignias on their wings'.[97] By midnight, with false reports of paratroopers dropping near the HQ, Baghdadi recalls: 'we were overcome by confusion and many of us were paralysed when it became clear that England and France had entered the war'. Nasser appears to have joined in the general panic, and failed to

89 31 October 1956, BBC-SWB: DS86.

90 Fayek Interview. See Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 108–9.

91 *Egyptian Gazette*, 6 December 1956.

92 Mar'i, 'Political Papers', pp. 364–5.

93 Baghdadi, *Memoirs*, p. 338; Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, pp. 337–8; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 368; Stephens, *Nasser*, p. 229.

94 Heikal claims that Nasser argued all night with Amer on this head, but it is hard to accept that the President could not have prevailed had he genuinely believed the need to be urgent; Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 108–9.

95 Baghdadi, *Memoirs*, pp. 338–9; Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, p. 339.

96 TNA, FO 371/121783. See also Michael Thornhill, 'Britain, the United States and the Rise of an Egyptian Leader: The Politics and Diplomacy of Nasser's Consolidation of Power, 1952–4', *English Historical Review*, 119/483 (2004): 11; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 368; Trevelyan, *Public and Private*, p. 79.

97 Jehan Sadat, *A Woman of Egypt* (New York, 1987), p. 158. See also Howeidy Interview; Amin Howeidy, *Ḥurūb 'abd al-nāṣir* (Beirut, 1979), p. 92.

take immediate charge.[98] The distress and confusion among the Egyptian leaders confirm that they had not expected an Anglo-French intervention, and found themselves profoundly unprepared, with many troops at risk of being cut off in the Sinai. Mar'i concludes: 'we were surprised by a war at a level far higher than our direct capability'.[99] Despite a series of increasingly definite indications of impending conflict from July onward, Nasser had never really expected to become involved in hostilities. And the fact that – in the end – Egypt did rather well out of the war was as much a shock to Nasser as to Sir Anthony Eden.

98 Baghdadi, *Memoirs*, pp. 339–40; Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, vol. 1, pp. 340–41; Kyle, *Suez*, p. 385.

99 Mar'i, 'Political Papers', pp. 366–7; Mosallem Interview.

Chapter 11

The Suez Crisis at the United Nations: The Effects for the Foreign Office and British Foreign Policy

Edward Johnson

Introduction

In the period up to the outbreak of the Suez crisis, the United Nations had played something of a mixed role in British foreign policy since its establishment in 1945. The Foreign Office had played a significant part in the creation of the UN through the writing of the 'Four Power Plan',[1] which provided the basis for the British ideas on the negotiations on the UN Charter at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in 1944. With the election of the Attlee government in 1945, the new UN took on potentially great significance, as the Labour government hoped to make it a key feature in its foreign policy as a place where the wartime allied relations of the Big Three could at best be maintained or at worst not ruptured: it was important, therefore, to avoid public splits within the forums of the UN, and this the Attlee government did attempt to do. However, this objective was not one which the British would shore up at any cost, and Attlee's government had to reassess and relegate its significance for British foreign policy as early as September 1946, as the developing Cold War tensions seeped into the UN and provided a very public stage for their exhibition. If the Labour government with its internationalist credentials could reduce the role of the UN in British foreign policy, then the Conservative government of Churchill could be expected to do no less. Even so, the UN was still considered of some significance for British foreign policy, even if it could not be used as a forum in which to moderate the effects of the developing Cold War.

In 1953, Britain's representative to the UN, Gladwyn Jebb, identified the range of advantages that the UN gave Britain.[2] For him, only on colonial and social questions had the UN done more harm than good, and that without the UN, the Afro-Asians and Latin America might retreat from wider East–West struggles and it was in Britain's interests to put up with 'quite a deal of nonsense to preserve this particular advantage'. However, Jebb was concerned that the UN should not be transformed solely into an anti-communist alliance,[3] as to do so would lead to the erosion of

1 Gladwyn Jebb, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London, 1972), pp. 108–10.
2 Despatch from Jebb to Eden, 12 January 1953, TNA, FO 371/107032/UP134/1.
3 Despatch from Jebb to Churchill, 15 June 1953, TNA, FO 371/107032/UP134/4.

middle state support. The following year, Sir Pierson Dixon echoed some of these sentiments when he replaced Jebb in New York.[4] For Dixon, the key for Britain was to maintain a common approach with the USA in the UN. This was not always easy, and issues such as Chinese representation and decolonization hindered the creation of a complete partnership with the Americans. Dixon felt Britain had to swallow its principles and dodge those contentious issues, for without an Anglo-US partnership, the UN was 'of questionable value' to Britain. In the light of the events at Suez, Dixon's warning was prophetic. It was the case, therefore, that by the mid-1950s the British and the Americans each saw the UN in a rather different light. For the British, it was a factor in foreign policy but an organization which the British largely tolerated. For the Americans, it was a central feature of foreign policy, an element in the American Cold War policy of containment, and almost a sacred institution. In the specific case of Suez, Eden's government was to find that the Eisenhower administration was determined not to allow the UN to be devalued by the British as a cover for military action against Egypt.

To the United Nations or Not?

A complicating factor in any discussion of the role of the UN in British policy over Suez is the fact that, as Keith Kyle has noted, there was 'an agenda within an agenda'.[5] When Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956, the Eden government's response was, in effect, twofold. The British Cabinet immediately agreed that international control had to be restored and that Britain would be prepared to use military force, and to do so, if necessary, alone.[6] But the overthrow of Nasser, whilst never a public goal, was also agreed by the British Cabinet's Egypt Committee.[7] The British did inform their American allies of their intentions, and from an early stage. Robert Murphy, the US Deputy Under-Secretary of State who was sent to London by Eisenhower on 28 July to 'hold the fort', had confirmed to him by Eden, Macmillan and Selwyn Lloyd that the British were intent upon using force to drive Nasser from Egypt.[8] Eisenhower received the same message from Eden on 5 August, when Eden indicated that while an international regime for the Canal was the primary British objective, 'the removal of Nasser and the installation in Egypt of a regime less hostile to the West must therefore also rank high among our objectives'.[9] This second objective was perhaps something which Eden and the Egypt Committee felt would follow from the first: that restoration of international control, either by diplomatic pressure or by military force if necessary, would lead to the downfall of Nasser's regime. Consequently, if force was to be used to eject

4 Despatch from Dixon to Eden, 20 August 1954, TNA, FO 371/112348/UP137/2.

5 Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London, 1991), p. 148.

6 CM (56) 54 concl. 27 July 1956, TNA, CAB 128/30 pt 2.

7 EC (56) 3rd mtg, 30 July 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1098.

8 Telegram from Murphy to State Department, no. 550, 31 July 1956, cited in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955–57, Volume XVI: Suez Crisis July 26–December 31, 1956* (Washington, DC, 1990), pp. 60–62.

9 Telegram from Eden to Eisenhower, no. 3568, 5 August 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1098.

Nasser from power either directly or indirectly, then what role would the UN play in the crisis? To refer the matter to the UN might not only allow the British to build up sufficient diplomatic pressure on the Egyptian government over time, but might then provide Britain with a possible pretext for the eventual use of force should Egypt prove intransigent over the restoration of international control. And, as the Eden government seems to have realized in the very early hours of the crisis that any military operation would take time to mount, reference to the UN would provide some time to allow military preparations to continue.

Eden did consider reference to the UN would be needed at some point,[10] but not immediately. A range of factors inhibited the British. The Cabinet ruled out an early recourse to the UN for fear of becoming, as it saw it, 'hopelessly bogged down'[11] in procedures geared to de-escalating the crisis while protecting Egypt in the Security Council with the Soviet veto.[12] Moreover, the British were not necessarily sure of their legal position as to whether Nasser's act constituted a threat to international peace and security under Article 34 of the UN Charter.[13] They were further restrained initially by the French[14] and by the United States. Sir Roger Makins, the British Ambassador in Washington, already had indications from Dulles, the US Secretary of State, that the Eisenhower administration would not support any attempt by the British to threaten or use force against Egypt to reverse the nationalization decision.[15] The Americans were against the UN being used as an international forum to provide a green light for military action. Instead, Dulles met the British and French for tripartite talks in London on 1 August and proposed negotiation through a conference of maritime powers, thereby avoiding any Soviet veto. The British went along with the American proposal, hoping – perhaps naively – that any opposition by Nasser towards the users of the Canal would create a climate whereby the use of force became more than a remote option. There is no doubt that Eden saw the idea of these early initiatives as ways of opening the gates to the use of military force should Nasser prove to be un-co-operative. Yet, of course, the British were to be disappointed in their expectations. Nasser rejected the declaration of the London Maritime Conference, not least because Eisenhower released a statement on 4 September indicating that the US government was determined to produce a peaceful settlement to the dispute. Nasser could understandably infer from this that the Americans were not willing to sanction the use of force.[16] The British were now prepared to go to the UN, but relented, again under American influence, to back the idea of the Suez Canal Users' Association (SCUA), only to see the Americans once more indicate that this would have no enforcement powers. At this point in

10 Anthony Eden, *Full Circle: The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden* (London, 1960), p. 429.

11 Telegram from Foster, the US Chargé d'Affaires in London, to State Department, no. 481, 27 July 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957*, vol. XVI, p. 4. Foster had been invited to an emergency meeting of the Cabinet on 26 July.

12 Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956: A Personal Account* (London, 1978), p. 84.

13 CM (56) 54 concl., 27 July 1956, TNA, CAB 128/30 pt 2.

14 Information provided by Sir Anthony Nutting to the author, 22 June 1979.

15 Telegram from Makins to FO, no. 1613, 30 July 1956, TNA, FO 371/119080/JE14211/87.

16 Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 469.

September, the British Cabinet accepted that reference to the United Nations could no longer be delayed.[17]

However, the move to the UN was itself the subject of mixed feelings within the Foreign Office. In August, there had been an internal debate over the appropriate management of the issue at the UN, on the assumption that Nasser would reject the demands of the London Maritime Conference. Dixon's deputy on the British delegation at the UN, Moore Crosthwaite, indicated his concerns that the Egyptians might pre-empt any initiative and get to the UN Security Council first to raise the issue of Anglo-French military preparations, which had been developing since July, as a threat to international peace. The British would see this as an Egyptian diversionary move, but would be hard pressed to oppose its inscription on the Security Council agenda as it might appear that they were seeking to frustrate the work of the UN: it would not play well with world opinion.[18] Ivor Pink, the Superintending Under-Secretary for the Foreign Office's UN Department, agreed with Crosthwaite, and saw great dangers of the British going to the Security Council to be then presented with an innocent-looking resolution which deprecated the use of force – something which could make subsequent military action difficult.[19] Dixon, while away from the UN in London, indicated that there was little hope of going to the UN Security Council and getting it to provide justification for the eventual use of force should Nasser reject the demands of the London Maritime Conference. He noted that Egypt had not been guilty of clear-cut aggression, and consequently it would be:

> Quite out of the question to extract from the Security Council a good vote on a resolution designed to justify subsequent use of force, particularly force exerted by two nations without further reference to the United Nations. The trend in the United Nations is to prevent the use of force and the outbreak of war, and to exert every possible effort in the direction of peaceful methods.[20]

The British must therefore realize that the UN would not provide cover for the use of force. Dixon was of the opinion to take no initiative in the UN at all, but to defend British actions when the time came.[21]

Dixon's concerns about the UN's unwillingness to provide cover for military action were shared by Pink. If the Egyptian government chose to appeal to the Security Council, Britain could make a defence of its military build-up, providing force had not actually been used, but the danger for Pink was the Security Council was as a quicksand: 'once one got on to it, one could never be sure how deep one could go or when one would get out'. This scepticism was echoed by Sir Gerald Fitzmaurice, the Legal Adviser to the Foreign Office. He warned colleagues that the Security Council was there to stop wars, and it was not primarily interested in dispensing international

17 CM (56) 67 concl., 26 September 1956, TNA, CAB 128/30 pt 2.

18 Note from Crosthwaite to Ross, 9 August 1956 and Pink's additional minute, 14 August 1956, TNA, FO 371/119174/JE14214/1/G.

19 Ibid.

20 'Suez situation and possible UN action', 24 August 1956, TNA, FO 371/119174/JE14214/21.

21 Ibid.

justice: it was therefore not much use appealing to it to provide cover for the use of force when that was what the Council was supposed to prevent.[22] Gladwyn Jebb, then Ambassador in Paris, indicated the drawn-out procedures that would surely occur once the UN was reached, with the Egyptians being able to counter any British resolution with one of their own. Jebb felt that recourse to the UN was advisable, but only once Nasser had indicated his intransigence with regard to any demands of the London Maritime Conference.[23] But, as we have seen, Nasser's subsequent inflexibility over these was disregarded by the Americans, thereby closing down a manoeuvre the British might have exploited.

What was true of the Security Council also held for the General Assembly, if not more so – a point that Dixon made from New York on his return. He envisaged a stand-off: the Egyptians being able to block a resolution supporting the London Conference proposals, and the British and their friends in the Assembly being able to block the passage of any resolution which upheld Egypt's right to nationalize the Canal Company. The danger for the British would be the probability that in the mean time, 'determined efforts would no doubt be made to cut in with proposals aimed at finding an outcome of the discussion acceptable to two-thirds of the members',[24] but not necessarily acceptable to Britain. To reinforce this, Dixon was informed by his American counterpart, Henry Cabot Lodge, that the Eisenhower administration was 'unalterably opposed to the use of force or to any action at the United Nations which would imperil the Organisation'. In an American election year, Lodge was 'quite emphatic that the United States Delegation would have to vote in favour of any resolution prescribing that force should not be used'.[25]

In these circumstances, the British were in a difficult position. To have not referred at some point to the Security Council might have looked as though Britain was failing in its international obligations, but the advice from officials to ministers was that reference would inevitably lead to a negotiated outcome: if the British were merely looking to restore international status to the Canal, then the UN might have provided a solution, but if Eden's government wanted Nasser hounded from power, there was no point seeking the UN to lead the pack. Thus, officials were cautious about going to the UN – it was ministers who sought out the Security Council. With the failure of the SCUA, Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd and the rest of the Cabinet agreed that to forestall a Soviet move in aid of Egypt at the UN and to avoid appearing as defendants, the UN had to be invoked.[26] The officials' warnings about the conciliatory tendencies of the UN seemed to have been borne out when the British and French became embroiled in negotiations over six principles put forward

22 Minutes by Pink and Fitzmaurice, 24 August 1956, TNA, FO 371/119174/JE14214/21A.

23 Memorandum by Jebb, 'Suez and the United Nations', 24 August 1956, TNA, FO 371/119177/JE14214/84/G.

24 Telegram from Dixon to FO, no. 658, 10 September 1956, TNA, FO 371/119176/JE14214/63.

25 Letter from Dixon to Selwyn Lloyd, 11 September 1956, TNA, FO 371/119177/JE14214/94.

26 Telegram FO to Washington, no. 4389, 22 September 1956, TNA FO 371/119178/JE14214/119.

by the British to govern the operation of the Canal. The British proposals were in part in line with those of the London Maritime Conference which Nasser had rejected, and they had tabled a resolution to that effect. Sensing that matters were dragging, the British pressed for a vote on their resolution: the Security Council accepted one part, but the Soviet delegation vetoed the second. The British could now show the UN as deadlocked, the Egyptians as untrustworthy, little more than Russian stooges, and portray themselves as having fulfilled their international obligations. Where this would have led is difficult to estimate: it matters little, however, as on the day of the vote in the UN, Eden met Gazier and Challe at Chequers and caught what he thought was a lifeline to use force but which was to be the undoing of his government, his career and of an independent British policy in the Middle East.

Hostilities at the UN

Thus, the key role of the UN was played out not through the attempted negotiations over the international status of the Canal, but as a forum in which the British and French had to defend their actions of issuing lop-sided ultimata to Egypt and Israel, and then invading Egypt ostensibly to protect the Canal. The very nature of Eden's collusive policy meant that many Foreign Office officials were excluded from the inner circle of those who knew the details of the arrangements with the French and the Israelis, and this exclusion was felt particularly by the British delegation at the UN. Dixon and his team were not 'in the know', which created some difficulties for them, at least initially. However, soon after the release of the ultimata, Dixon, the man who Macmillan felt had the most subtle mind in Whitehall,[27] must have been able to draw some fairly clear conclusions about collusion which the US and Soviet delegations had already deduced, and in the US case, were to have confirmed to them, almost immediately, by the French.[28] Under severe moral and physical strain, Dixon did his best to defend British policy in a plausible and confident manner, although he gradually realized that it 'was misconceived' and would probably fail.[29] The British defence generated precisely the reaction within the UN that Fitzmaurice had warned about in the summer of 1956. The UN was not prepared to underwrite military action against Egypt. Even less was it going to endorse it as part of a policy constructed on what seemed dishonourable and collusive foundations. The result was significant levels of hostility directed towards the British delegation. The Americans ostracized their British colleagues,[30] and relations with other delegations were seriously affected. It left the UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, normally a cold, unemotional man, furious and dismayed that Britain could behave in such a manner, and even led Dixon to question whether Britain could continue its military operations and remain a

27 A. Horne, *Macmillan, 1957–1986* (London, 1989), p. 326.

28 At noon in Paris on 1 November, Douglas Dillon, the American Ambassador in Paris, had sent a despatch relaying a conversation with Pineau that morning in which the French Foreign Minister confirmed collusion; see *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XVI, pp. 900–901.

29 P. Dixon, *Double Diploma: The Life of Sir Pierson Dixon, Don and Diplomat* (London, 1968), p. 278.

30 Evidence of Lord Hurd of Westwell to the author, 16 December 1996.

member of the UN. It also spared the Soviet Union the full weight of the UN's moral approbrium descending on it following its invasion of Hungary.

At the UN, Dixon was instructed to play for time, to delay, obstruct and even prevent the UN from intervening before the Canal had been captured and Nasser weakened as a prelude to his removal – the second British objective. He was given instructions from Selwyn Lloyd to ensure, if possible, that no resolution, American or otherwise, was submitted or discussed in the UN.[31] He thus refused to support the Americans in calling the Security Council into session on 30 October,[32] but that, having failed, he then vetoed the two resolutions put before the Council: an American one which labelled the Israelis aggressors and demanded an immediate cease-fire, and a rather milder Soviet one which omitted the cease-fire provisions. This was the first time the British had ever used the veto in the Security Council, something which created grave reservations for Dixon, but he carried out his instructions, having been encouraged by three telephone conversations with Selwyn Lloyd.[33] Having induced deadlock in the Security Council, the British then opposed the use of the 1950 'Uniting for Peace Resolution' by the Americans to transfer Suez to the General Assembly, and when that failed, Dixon was confronted by a further American cease-fire resolution in the General Assembly, which he again opposed.[34]

This behaviour was profoundly shocking to Britain's allies. It created very bad feeling between Dixon and Cabot Lodge, whilst the Norwegian representative considered the British vetoes 'an appalling blow to Western unity'.[35] Hammarskjold publicly rebuked the British and French, so incensed was he with their vetoes.[36] These were states from whom he expected better standards, particularly the British.[37] Their standing in the UN was at an all-time low. This position led Dixon to warn London of the strength of opposition at the UN and the dangers of voting against the Americans, who had broad support in the General Assembly. In unequivocal language, he noted that Britain's closest friends were becoming 'intensely worried at the possible consequences which might follow if we and the French remained for long in open defiance of the United Nations'. There was talk of collective action being taken against both powers, and even Britain's allies were concerned that 'our open defiance of the United Nations may be compounded to the point where we have no option

31 Telegram from FO to Dixon, no. 1381, 30 October 1956, TNA, FO371/121746/VR1074/432. Selwyn Lloyd informed the British Embassy in Washington on the same day not to indicate anything which might imply British support for the US line in the Security Council; see telegram 500G, TNA, FO 371/121746/VR1074/429.

32 Telegram from Dixon to FO, no. 975, 30 October 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1105.

33 Telegram from Dixon to FO, no. 989, 30 October I956, TNA, FO 371/121746/VR1074/447.

34 *United Nations General Assembly Official Records*, 1st Emergency Special Session, 562nd mtg, 1–2 November 1956.

35 Telegram from Dixon to FO, no. 989, 30 October I956, TNA, FO 371/121746/VR1074/447.

36 B. Urquhart, *Hammarskjold* (London, 1972), p. 174.

37 Ibid., p. 175.

but to leave the organization'.[38] While loyal to Eden, Dixon despaired that the use of force against non-military targets made 'a mockery of our repeated assertions that our intervention was an emergency police action confined to the occupation of a few key points along the Canal'. Britain's position in the UN was becoming untenable, it could not bomb open cities and expect any sympathy, and 'in these circumstances the only honest course for Her Majesty's Government and the French Government would be to withdraw their representatives and leave the United Nations'.[39] He warned that Eden's government was being placed 'in the same low category as the Russians in their bombing of Budapest', and the General Assembly, outraged at British military action, were 'in a very ugly mood and out for our blood'.[40]

The British position in the UN was eventually salvaged from further humiliation and embarrassment when the Canadian Minister for External Affairs, Lester Pearson, and Hammarskjold threw a lifeline in the form of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to police the borders between Israel and Egypt, an idea which had the weight of the US delegation behind it.[41] Even so, the British could only abstain on the vote.[42] So although the British were prepared to welcome the idea of a UN force – it provided a diplomatic and military face-saver – they could not vote in support of its creation. But then other factors came into play to force a cease-fire. With American economic pressure building, and faced with evidence from the Chancellor of the Exchequer Harold Macmillan – but not necessarily from the Treasury – that Britain's reserves were plummeting, and with economic ruin imminent, the Cabinet agreed, on 6 November, to halt hostilities.

After the Cease-fire

What, then, was the Foreign Office to make of the UN in the wake of Suez? In the short term, there was clear hostility from senior figures towards the UN and the role it had seemingly played in forcing the British cease-fire, even though many of the same officials had previously warned that the UN would not endorse military force to regain the Canal. The British resentment was directed specifically at the General Assembly and Hammarskjold, and the 'Uniting for Peace Resolution' which had allowed both to play a prominent role in the crisis although much of the direction had come with the sanction of the Eisenhower administration. In general terms, there was outrage that the UN had been able to arraign the British so publicly. Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, the Permanent-Under Secretary, set the tone of resentment felt

38 Telegram Dixon to FO, no. 1009, 2 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121747/VR1074/473.

39 Telegram Dixon to FO, no. 1033, 3 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121747/VR1074/490.

40 Telegram from Dixon to FO, no. 1071, 5 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121748/VR1074/517. On 4 November, the Soviet Union had launched a major offensive to crush the Hungarian uprising in Budapest.

41 *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XVI, p. 957, note 2.

42 See the minute by R.F. Stretton, 'The history of the reply sent to Hammarskjold', 5 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121751/VR1074/627.

by many of his colleagues. He conveyed to the American Ambassador in November his bitterness towards the UN, that it had become an organization not interested in justice, and that if Britain's faith in it was to prove misplaced, he would recommend British withdrawal; it was in danger of becoming 'an institution for the organisation of collective chaos'.[43] In particular, the General Assembly had been guilty of gross double standards in its treatment of the British and French over Suez and its inability to deal with the Soviet Union in the same manner over Hungary. Moreover, Suez had given a greater political role to Hammarskjold than the British would have liked, a role sanctioned not by the Security Council, but by the General Assembly. Hammarskjold had been able to take political decisions over the formation of UNEF, its composition and mandate which were beyond the control of the British. From New York, Dixon was seriously concerned about the role of Hammarskjold and the increasingly prominent role he was playing in the UN. He was: 'a very obstinate creature with a unique gift for combining high moral principles with an obscurity of thought and expression which makes it almost impossible sometimes to understand what he is saying, let alone what he is driving at'.[44]

In these circumstances, the British Foreign Office sought to map out its approach to the General Assembly, Hammarskjold and the broad role of the UN after Suez. There was resistance to any expanded role for the Assembly and the Secretary-General. In February 1957, Pink produced a memorandum, 'The United Nations – A Stocktaking',[45] which was to be used as the basis of the British position on the UN in discussions with the Americans in Bermuda in March as a means of restoring Anglo-American relations. Pink had no time for the General Assembly and the way in which it had forced Britain on to the defensive: Britain had been like 'a man with his back to the wall facing a pack of Afro-Asian jackals'.[46] Suez had revealed the disagreeable element of the General Assembly where some newly admitted Afro-Asian states could act as a united bloc and with impunity against Britain's interests. This bloc behaviour along with the invoking of the 'Uniting for Peace Resolution', allowing the General Assembly to discuss and decide matters normally the preserve of the Security Council, had been a disaster for Britain. The effect had been:

> To transfer discussion of issues affecting the security interests of the major powers from the Security Council, a small and carefully chosen body where their interests are in the last resort protected by the veto, to the General Assembly, which by its very composition is an essentially irresponsible body and where no such safeguards operate.[47]

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43 Telegram from Kirkpatrick to Dixon, no. 2262, 26 November 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1106.

44 Note from Dixon to Kirkpatrick, 22 December 1956, TNA, FO 371/119189/JE14214/401/G.

45 'The United Nations – A Stocktaking', 7 February 1957, TNA, FO 371/129903/UN2251/27.

46 Pink's note to Paul Gore-Booth, 30 March 1957, TNA, FO 371/129903/UN2251/36.

47 'The United Nations – A Stocktaking', 7 February 1957, TNA, FO 371/129903/UN2251/27.

Britain was a state much affected by world opinion – Pink chose not to mention American financial pressure – and could not proceed with the military action when condemned by the Assembly. It followed that Britain had to work to ensure the Security Council resumed control over security issues, and thereby re-establish Britain as one of the powers 'who in effect run the United Nations'. Pink was, in effect, adopting a very Soviet view of the appropriate roles of the Council and Assembly. As part of this exercise of restoring the correct institutional equilibrium, it was vital that Britain, with American support, seek to reduce the powers of the Secretary-General:

> Our objective must be, together with the Americans, to make it plain to Mr. Hammarskjold that he and his assistants are welcome as partners, but not as masters, of our enterprise. Until we have regained our position we must be chary of entrusting more of our Middle East interests to the care of the United Nations than is absolutely necessary.[48]

Pink's paper was approved within the Foreign Office by the new Permanent Under-Secretary, Frederick Hoyer Millar – Kirkpatrick had retired in January – who considered it 'on the right lines'.[49] Pink then used the memorandum as the basis for an article in the *London Evening News* entitled, 'It is time we cut the UN down to size', by the diplomatic correspondent C.F. Melville. Pink provided Melville with the ammunition to construct an article which called for the reduction in the influence of both the General Assembly and the Secretary-General whilst returning security issues to their rightful place in the Security Council. Pink felt Melville had done a 'first class job',[50] while Dixon at the UN was pleased the Foreign Office was 'educating public opinion in this way'.[51]

From his retirement, Kirkpatrick added to the criticism of the UN in an article, 'Must the UN Collapse?', for *The Sunday Times* in March 1957. In December, he had warned his colleagues that the UN could not be relied on, and considered it important to explain to the British people the imprudence of placing any faith in it.[52] Kirkpatrick now had his opportunity: he disgorged his bile against the General Assembly which had usurped the Security Council's role at Suez. The Assembly had ignored justice for the British, being interested merely in preventing the use of force which Kirkpatrick considered justified at Suez. If change did not occur, international lawlessness would result, with far too much licence and influence being bestowed on the Secretary-General.[53]

In contrast, Patrick O'Donovan, the diplomatic correspondent of the *Observer*, penned an article, 'Towards Reason', on the same day as Kirkpatrick. O'Donovan portrayed the General Assembly after Suez as truly reflective of world opinion, in contrast to the Security Council, which was still the forum of great power politics.

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48 Ibid.

49 Minute by Hoyer Millar, 11 February 1957, TNA, FO 371/129903/UN251/27.

50 Pink to Melville, 11 March 1957, TNA, FO 371/129903/UN2251/24.

51 Minute by Scrivener, echoing Dixon's views, 19 March 1957, TNA, FO 371/129903/UN2251/24.

52 Minute by Kirkpatrick, 21 December 1956, TNA, FO 371/123755/UN2286/27.

53 *The Sunday Times*, 24 March 1957.

O'Donovan saw hope in this movement, and believed it a welcome change in the UN's position in world politics.[54] In the Foreign Office, O'Donovan was seen as a hopeless idealist close to many in the UN Secretariat, and his article gave 'a terribly misleading description of the UN which will do nothing to clarify people's minds about it'.[55] While Dalton Murray, the Head of the UN department, gave approval to Kirkpatrick's view as reflecting the Foreign Office position on the UN,[56] he did note that O'Donovan's ideas were those held in Ottawa and New Delhi and in parts of the US State Department. Consequently, an attitude of 'cynical disillusion' towards the UN would not profit the British, and perhaps O'Donovan was noting a reality which they would need to take into account.[57]

There were other notes of caution raised within the Foreign Office – those who specifically dissented from the Pink/Kirkpatrick line. Paul Gore-Booth, who later became Permanent Under-Secretary, opposed the idea that the Afro-Asians always acted as a bloc in the General Assembly against Britain.[58] He also warned against attempting to challenge the American view of the UN. For American governments, the United Nations was 'almost a sacred institution', and any seeds of censure would bear no fruit in Washington. However, the Foreign Office orthodoxy prevailed, and in consultation with the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office, Pink's memorandum was used as a paper to take to the Anglo-US-Canadian talks at Bermuda. This, 'The Future Utilisation of the United Nations to meet the needs of the West', had originally been entitled 'Means of Getting the United Nations Back on the Rails',[59] which aptly summed up the Foreign Office concerns, but it was changed to accommodate American sensitivities before the Bermuda meeting.[60] Yet it pulled no punches in noting how the powers of the General Assembly had been transformed at Suez, especially since the invoking of the 'Uniting for Peace Resolution', and this in turn had allowed the Secretary-General a political role in the licence accorded him in the interpretation of Assembly resolutions. In these circumstances, the British felt they had lost control of the UN; they could no longer command the blocking one-third vote in the Assembly. Macmillan, Eden's successor as Prime Minister, and Selwyn Lloyd, the Foreign Secretary, took these ideas to the conference and wished to see the Americans support them in playing down the role of this revived UN in Western policy.[61]

These views, however, were not shared by the Americans, the State Department taking a much less critical line on the Assembly and Hammarskjold's powers. At Bermuda, both governments recognized the imperfections of the UN, and in

54 *Observer*, 24 March 1957.

55 Minute by Scrivener, 28 March 1957, TNA, FO 371/129903/UN2251/31.

56 Minute by Dalton Murray – head of the UN Department – 29 March 1957, TNA, FO 371/129903/UN2251/29.

57 Ibid.

58 Minute by Gore-Booth to the 'Stocktaking' memorandum, 12 April 1957, TNA, FO 371/129904/UN2252/45.

59 Intel no. 66, 'United Kingdom Policy Towards the United Nations', 9 April 1957, TNA, FO 371/129905/UN2251/64.

60 TNA, FO 371/129913/UN22515/7.

61 Ibid.

particular, the British emphasized the unsatisfactory nature of the General Assembly and worked to gain American support to restore the Security Council to its primary role.[62] Eisenhower, interestingly, also thought the General Assembly an untrustworthy body, to be avoided where vital interests were concerned. However, Dulles, far from feeling despondent about the Assembly's role, considered it a useful and developing instrument for dealing with international problems.[63] The British noted that the Americans were less dogmatic in defence of the UN than they had been, and were keen for Britain not to turn its back on the organization. Both states agreed not to accord it primacy in their foreign policy – not that the British ever had – and to co-ordinate their policies through the UN more closely in the future:[64] this was about as much as the British could hope to achieve at Bermuda, and their hard, anti-UN line had to be abandoned.

In June 1957, after a period of reflection, Dixon cabled a major despatch on 'Future Policy Towards The United Nations'. While he continued the Pink/Kirkpatrick approach that the UN had operated against British interests, he noted in a tone of realism that it was here to stay, and Britain would have to temper and rein in any criticism, if only to retain influence within it. The British should work to restore the pre-eminence of the Security Council in matters of peace and security, which would reduce the dangerous role the Secretary-General had acquired at Suez. And in the Assembly, the British 'reputation for wisdom and responsibility had recovered more rapidly than seemed possible' at the time of Suez. Dixon advised that the British must avoid the reputation of a hostile critic of the UN and not appear too cynical or beset by rancour. Through this approach, they might be able to 'control the abuse of the Assembly as a platform for anti-colonial and anti-western manoeuvres'.[65]

Dixon thus seems to have adopted a more conciliatory manner once the passion of Suez had been spent. Within the wider Foreign Office, the Pink/Kirkpatrick position of resentment towards the UN was gradually adjusted towards the more sanguine and realistic outlook of those such as Gore-Booth: that the UN was here to stay, and the British had to make the best of it as well as maintaining close co-operation with the USA – exactly what Dixon had seen as important in British foreign policy in the UN in pre-Suez days. This British commitment to the UN was graphically reinforced in 1959 when they were confronted by a dramatic swing in American opinion with respect to the organization. In January, Dulles, previously the guardian of its reputation, had condemned the double standards of the UN brought about by the Soviet influence in the Assembly, and in a remarkable echo of Kirkpatrick, declared it had to be an instrument of peace and justice or the Americans might seek to create another body to replace it.[66] Dulles's exasperation seemed to reinforce

62 Intel no. 66, 'United Kingdom Policy Towards the United Nations', 9 April 1957, TNA, FO 371/129905/UN2251/64.

63 Selwyn Lloyd (UK delegation, Bermuda) to FO, 25 March 1957, TNA, FO 371/129913/UN22515/8.

64 Intel no. 66, 'United Kingdom Policy Towards the United Nations', 9 April 1957, TNA, FO 371/129905/UN2251/64.

65 Despatch by Dixon, 4 June 1957, TNA, FO 371/129904/57.

66 Dulles's speech, 31 January 1959, TNA, FO 371/145302/UN2258/1.

Eisenhower's growing frustration with the UN when, during Macmillan's visit to Washington in June 1958, the President wondered if it might be necessary to think of establishing some other world organization.[67] In order to be able to meet American ideas if they arose – which, in the event, they did not – the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook, requested that the Foreign Office undertake a review in consultation with other departments. The result was a Cabinet paper, 'The United Nations and a Free World Organisation',[68] which was not intended to be discussed in Cabinet, but provided a means to set out the British views on the value of the UN and alternatives, a free world body being one. It reiterated many of the British complaints of the UN after Suez – the concentration on peace as against justice, the absence of an effective means to halt aggression by the Soviet Union, and the rise of the General Assembly – but noted that it had 'considerable educative and persuasive powers', was a means of channelling economic assistance to developing states, and could be, in spite of Suez, a valuable instrument for quiet diplomacy and negotiation. The British could therefore not withdraw or afford to see it destroyed, and there was no advantage in seeking an alternative. The aim of British policy should be, where possible, to strengthen ties through greater consultation at the UN among the Western powers.

Conclusion

Suez thus led to some rethinking in the Foreign Office on the machinery of the UN and its value to British foreign policy. Those such as Kirkpatrick, on the verge of retirement, Pink, and to a lesser degree Dixon, had real doubts about the future role of the UN in British foreign policy, and were able to influence their political masters to say as much to the Americans at Bermuda. In reality, it was easier to attack the UN than it was the Eisenhower administration which had used the levers of the organization against the British. Yet within two years of the crisis, the Foreign Office had returned to an acceptance of the UN and was prepared to see a positive role, within limits, for the British in it. The disadvantages of membership of the organization were outweighed by the advantages, and the demons of Suez which had led to calls for withdrawal from, and rejection of, the UN in late 1956 had been put to one side rather rapidly. By 1959, perhaps somewhat surprisingly given the events of October and November 1956, the Foreign Office had indeed become the defender of the UN and of Britain's and the West's continued and active membership against a possible and surprising, if temporary, proposed American rejection of the organization.

67 Minute by Ramsbotham, 17 February 1959, TNA, FO 371/143685/ZP9/2/G.

68 The paper has a reference C(59)86, TNA, CAB 129/97, but does not appear in the Cabinet files; there is a copy as SC (58) 52 Final, TNA, FO 371/143685/ZP9/2/G.

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Chapter 12

In Search of 'Some Big, Imaginative Plan': The Eisenhower Administration and American strategy in the Middle East after Suez

Richard V. Damms

The Suez crisis is commonly regarded as a major turning point in Anglo-American relations, the moment when the United States assumed Britain's role as the predominant external power in the Middle East.[1] Certainly, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles felt compelled to undertake a major strategic reassessment in the aftermath of the Suez affair. The transition from British to American pre-eminence, however, was neither as smooth nor as complete as has been suggested.[2] Rather, a careful examination of American policy toward the Middle East reveals that the expansion of American power in the late 1950s was at times halting, uncertain, and subject to internal debate and disagreement. Faced with what seemed to be the imminent collapse of British and French power in the region, Eisenhower's administration wrestled with the problem of how best to contain both Soviet influence and its apparent proxy, radical pan-Arab nationalism. The Eisenhower Doctrine, enunciated in early 1957, envisioned using American military and economic power to bolster conservative Arab regimes in a common front against these twin threats. Within a year, however, the shortcomings of such an approach were becoming readily apparent. Even before the 1958 Iraqi revolution, regional specialists in the State Department urged the

1 For a sampling of works stressing 1956 as a major turning point, see Steven Z. Freiberger, *Dawn over Suez: The Rise of American Power in the Middle East, 1953–1957* (Chicago, IL, 1992); Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945–1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991), and Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955–1967* (Boulder, CO, 1994).

2 For works asserting an orderly 'transfer of power' and British imperial decline in the Middle East, see especially Ritchie Ovendale, *Britain, the United States, and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945–1962* (London, 1996); W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the United States, and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1991); Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London, 2003), and Nathan J. Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Saud, and the Making of US–Saudi Relations* (Bloomington, IN, 2002).

administration to modify its strategy to align the United States more closely with Arab nationalist aspirations. The Eisenhower Doctrine thus proved to be a stopgap measure. Adverse regional reaction to American military intervention in Lebanon and British intervention in Jordan persuaded Eisenhower to seek alternative means of securing Western interests. Ultimately, he set the United States on a course that would form the basis for American strategy in the region into the next decade: close consultation and co-operation with Britain, particularly with regard to securing access to vital oil supplies, although stopping short of the more fully integrated Anglo-American approach favoured by the British; limited accommodation with Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt and a more general effort to disengage from internal Arab politics; a tentative rapprochement with Israel, and the cultivation of Saudi Arabia and Iran as future junior partners in the region.

The 1956 Suez–Sinai War threw the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration's Middle Eastern policy into disarray. The Anglo-French-Israeli action put paid to American hopes for regional solidarity against the Soviet bloc, jeopardized the flow of oil to western Europe, killed off any lingering thoughts of an Arab–Israeli settlement in the near future, and seemed to signal the death knell for British predominance in the area. In Washington, it was universally assumed that the collapse of Anglo-French power in the region had created a dangerous vacuum into which the Soviet Union was ready to leap. Moreover, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser scored a remarkable political victory as Arabs throughout the region vented their anger at Western colonialism.[3] American planners immediately concluded that the United States had no choice but to step into the breach to safeguard Western interests and deny the region to the Soviets, but just how American power would be projected and Western interests defended became problematic. The state of political flux in the region hampered efforts to devise a coherent strategy, as did bureaucratic divisions within the administration. After a series of false starts, however, by late 1958 the administration had laid the foundations for an American strategy towards the region that would endure into the next decade.

Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles viewed the Middle East primarily in Cold War terms. Nasser, either wittingly or unwittingly, seemed to be playing the Soviets' game by assailing the vestiges of Western imperialism in the region, promoting pan-Arab unity, and pursing a policy of positive neutrality and non-alignment in the Cold War that was opening the door to the expansion of Soviet influence. They worried that, with Britain and France licking their wounds, American failure to act might enable the Soviets to turn the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's southern flank.[4] In the words of British Chancellor of the Exchequer

3 National Security Council Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), Progress Report on United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East (NSC 5428), 22 December 1956, White House Office, NSC Staff Papers, Disaster File, Box 64, Near East (8), DDEL.

4 Eisenhower to Dulles, 12 December 1956, US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955–57, Volume XVI: Suez Crisis, July 26–December 31, 1956* (Washington, DC, 1990), p. 1297.

Harold Macmillan, it was time for the Americans to 'think up some big, imaginative plan for the Middle East'.[5]

At first, Eisenhower gave serious consideration to his top military advisers' preference of formally joining the Baghdad Pact, the regional alliance formed by Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Britain in 1955. The pact had itself evolved out of Dulles's original Northern Tier concept for an indigenous grouping to contain the Soviet Union in the Near East, but formal British adherence had subverted the original purpose. Indeed, British participation had served to transform the pact into a central issue in the domestic politics of several Arab nations, providing a convenient target for Arab nationalists railing against Western imperialism. Nevertheless, following Suez, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the civilian leadership in the Pentagon repeatedly argued that United States adherence to the pact would ensure its long-term viability and reassure its nervous members of American military support in the event of Soviet encroachment.[6] Although Eisenhower toyed with the idea, he eventually came around to the State Department's conclusion that American membership of the alliance would be politically unwise. Rather than bolstering confidence throughout the region, association with what was now perceived as a British-led group would tar the United States with the Western imperialist brush, antagonize the Arab states in the region that had already denounced the pact, and possibly heighten Israeli demands for similar security guarantees.[7] Although the Pentagon would periodically revive its push for American membership of the pact under various guises, Eisenhower's position remained firm, never moving beyond additional military aid packages for Baghdad Pact members and limited American participation in certain pact committees.

Having ruled out a formal commitment to the Baghdad Pact, and having determined that a brand new regional anti-communist collective security system would be too politically difficult to erect in a timely manner, Eisenhower and Dulles decided upon a unilateral approach. Unveiled early in 1957, what the administration dubbed the American Doctrine, but inevitably became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, offered direct assistance to Middle Eastern countries threatened by international communism. Modelled on the earlier Truman Doctrine, whereby the United States had taken over British responsibilities for supporting Greece and Turkey, and the 1955 Formosa Resolution, in which Congress had granted the President discretionary authority to deploy the American military as he saw fit for the defence of Formosa, the Eisenhower Doctrine promised to disburse up to $200 million in economic and military aid, and if necessary, dispatch American military forces to any nation 'requesting assistance against armed aggression from any

5 Memo of conversation between Dulles and Macmillan, 12 December 1956, *FRUS, 1955–57,* vol. XXVII (Washington, DC, 1992), pp. 677–8.

6 Wilson to Eisenhower, 4 December, 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957*, vol. XII (Washington, DC, 1991), pp. 372–4.

7 Eisenhower telephone conversation with Dulles, 8 December 1956, ibid., pp. 395–6; memo of conversation, 15 March 1956, ibid., p. 259; Wilson to Dulles, 5 April 1956, ibid., p. 267; JCS Chairman Arthur Radford to Wilson, 30 November 1956, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary (WHO, OSS) Records, Subject Series, DOD Subseries, Box 1, Department of Defense, vol. I(3), DDEL.

country controlled by international communism'.[8] Whilst ostensibly directed against Soviet expansion, the new American policy implicitly targeted Nasser and his radical brand of anti-Western, pan-Arab nationalism. In effect, the administration intended to drive a wedge between the Nasserites, who openly flirted with the Soviet bloc, and the more conservative Arab regimes which might be wooed towards a Western orientation in exchange for military and economic aid from the United States on a bilateral basis.[9]

Reaction to this assertion of American power in the Middle East varied considerably. The British still preferred a reinvigorated Baghdad Pact arrangement. Indeed, there was some resentment over Dulles's congressional testimony on behalf of the Middle East Resolution in which he implied that joint military action in the region with the British might well push Arab nations more firmly into the communist camp. Nevertheless, Macmillan, who by now was Prime Minister, set aside his private reservations and publicly welcomed the American initiative. His first priority was to safeguard global British interests by repairing Anglo-American relations and attempting to rekindle something akin to the 'special relationship' of the Second World War era. To an extent, this would entail making Britain into the indispensable junior partner of the United States. Thus, Macmillan made the best of a bad situation and endorsed the doctrine.[10] Similarly, Baghdad Pact members Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, which bordered the Soviet Union, embraced the prospect of greater American aid for regional security, although they continued to press for American adherence to the pact.

In the Arab world, however, reaction was more varied, and among regional leaders it was largely hostile. Whilst the pro-Western regimes in Iraq, Lebanon and Libya endorsed the doctrine, both Nasser and the Syrians denounced it as a further form of Western imperialism.[11] In Jordan, King Hussein's precarious domestic position militated against an outright endorsement, although he soon negotiated an American aid package to replace the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty and British subsidy which had become politically unsustainable.[12] Similarly, Saudi Arabia's King Saud, who harboured regional leadership ambitions and whom the Americans hoped to build up as a rival to Nasser, accepted American aid, but stopped short of a public statement of support.[13] On the whole, this was hardly the ringing endorsement the Americans had hoped to extract.

With regard to the military commitments envisioned under the new doctrine, American military planners were confident that they could unilaterally enforce its

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8 House Joint Resolution 117, as amended, to promote Peace and Stability in the Middle East, 7 March 1957, in US Department of State, *Bulletin*, 36 (25 March 1957), 481.

9 Dulles to Department of State, 12 December 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957*, vol. XVI, p. 1298; Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), p. 79.

10 Nigel John Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan, and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955–59* (New York, 1996), p. 109.

11 US Embassy, Damascus, to State Department, 11 January 1957, *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XIII (Washington, DC, 1988), pp. 609–10.

12 Ibid., p. 118.

13 Eisenhower to Dulles, 12 December 1956, *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XVI, p. 1297.

provisions with existing forces. The Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the smaller Middle East Task Force in the Persian Gulf–Arabian Sea–Red Sea area could respond to a regional crisis in a matter of a few hours. With adequate alert, the US Air Force could deploy combat aircraft from Europe to Turkey for action within 12 hours, and a Strategic Air Command wing in North Africa could be made available for back-up strikes as necessary. The US Army, meanwhile, could dispatch an advance party of 600 men and 300 tons of equipment from Europe immediately, to be followed up by a regimental combat team of 11,000 troops. Two US Army divisions, a Marine division, and an Air Force Wing could also be deployed to the region from the United States within 25 days. The Joint Chiefs of Staff expected that small, mobile, atomic-capable forces would be more than a match for any regional power or combination of powers in the event of a flare up in the Arab–Israeli dispute or aggression by a nation acting as an agent of international communism. In the worst-case scenario of war with the Soviet Union, the Pentagon envisaged a 'strategic defence' of the Middle East involving nuclear air strikes against the Soviet heartland.[14] This impressive arsenal of military power helped to bolster King Hussein with a show of force in April 1957 when he requested American support to forestall a pro-Nasser coup against him.

While willing to flex American military muscle in the Middle East unilaterally, if necessary, Eisenhower also understood the importance of quickly restoring working relations with the British for the sake of solidifying the Western position in the Cold War, hence his eagerness to meet with the new Prime Minister at the Bermuda Conference early in 1957. Despite some early pessimistic American assessments at the height of the Suez crisis, the wholesale collapse of British power prophesied by some had failed to materialize. Indeed, heading into the conference, a State Department position paper emphasized that the United States 'wished to maintain Britain as an important and effective ally', and would seek to develop 'mutually consistent policies in the Middle East'.[15] Eisenhower reassured the British that, if anything, the United States wanted to 'build them up again in the Middle East'.[16] For his part, Macmillan recognized Britain's 'reduced role' in the region, but asserted that the forces of neutralism and nationalism could be channelled by 'a combination of power, propaganda, assistance, and services', and he assured Eisenhower that Britain was 'committed to stay in the game and to cooperate with the United States'.[17]

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14 Capabilities to meet situations arising in the Middle East, memo of presentation by the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Arthur Radford before Joint State-Defense Conference, 23 July 1957; Radford memo for Secretary of Defense Wilson, Military Implications of Joint Resolution 117 on the Middle East, 13 June 1957, and Wilson memo to Executive Secretary NSC, 26 June 1957, all in Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Records (OSANSA), NSC Series, Policy Papers Sub-series, Box 20, NSC 5703/1, Iran, DDEL; memo of discussion at 331st meeting of NSC, 18 July 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers as President, Ann Whitman File (AWF), NSC Series, Box 9, DDEL.

15 Position paper Prepared in Bureau of European Affairs, 13 February 1957, *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XII, p. 694.

16 Memo of conversation, 21 March 1957, ibid., p. 716.

17 Ibid., pp. 710–11.

Despite the general air of goodwill among the participants and Eisenhower's later assessment that the Anglo-American conclave was 'by far the most successful international meeting I have attended since World War II', Bermuda highlighted some significant differences between British and American approaches to the region. Whilst generally agreeing on the importance of securing the flow of Middle Eastern oil for Western Europe and minimizing Soviet influence in such a vital strategic area, divergent views emerged over how best to secure these common interests. The British continued to excoriate Nasser as a completely unreasonable dictator, equating him with a latter-day Mussolini who was destined to become a stooge of the Kremlin, much as Mussolini had become a stooge of Hitler. Macmillan sought American backing for a coup against Nasser, and 'hoped that he would come to some bad end'.[18] Eisenhower, however, insisted that the United States could not countenance such action while still seeking to work with the Egyptians to achieve a satisfactory Suez Canal settlement. Rather than employing direct action against Nasser, the Americans preferred to contain him, and solicited British acquiescence in building up King Saud as a rival Arab leader who might eventually 'sidetrack' Nasser. The British did not share the Eisenhower administration's rosy assessment of the King's statesmanship and his potential as an alternative focus of Arab nationalism to Nasser, nor were they prepared to reach a compromise agreement over the Buraimi Oasis dispute between Saudi Arabia and the British-supported Sheikhdom of Abu Dhabi and Sultanate of Muscat and Oman that had led to a severing of Anglo-Saudi diplomatic relations the previous November. Macmillan remained adamant that he would not betray Britain's friends in the Gulf and thereby jeopardize British pre-eminence in such a vital area. Rather than courting Saud, the British preferred to bolster the pro-Western regime in Baghdad.[19]

Regardless of these difficulties, it soon became clear that Anglo-American interests converged over Syria, where the Communist and Baath Parties vied for power and both represented a threat to Western security and economic well-being. By August 1957, the communists seemed to have gained the upper hand and American relations with Syria reached their nadir. The Syrian government signed an aid agreement with the Soviet Union and thwarted an American covert operation to stage a military coup, resulting in the expulsion of several American diplomatic personnel.[20] As the pro-communist head of the Syrian Army began purging suspect officers, the Eisenhower administration worried about the imminent advance of Soviet influence, as did Syria's pro-Western neighbours, Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan.[21] Macmillan was similarly troubled, but also saw an opportunity to restore

18 Eisenhower diary entry, 21 March 1957, *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XXVII, pp. 719–20. On Macmillan's determination to oust Nasser, see Stephen Blackwell, 'Pursuing Nasser: The Macmillan Government and the Management of British Policy towards the Middle East Cold War, 1957–1963', *Cold War History*, 4/3 (2004): 85–104.

19 Dulles memo of conversation, 20 March 1957, *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XXVII, p. 706; memo of conversation, 21 March 1957, ibid., pp. 713–14.

20 Memo of discussion at 335th meeting of NSC, 22 August 1957, AWF, NSC Series, Box 9, DDEL.

21 Dulles memo of conversation with the president, 2 September 1957, Dulles Papers, White House Memo Series, Box 5, Meetings with the President, 1957 (3), DDL.

the clandestine collaboration between British and American intelligence agencies towards Syria that had existed until the Suez debacle. Spurred on by the imminent communist threat, the Eisenhower administration agreed to establish a secret, high-level Anglo-American Working Group on Syria which began drafting contingency plans in September. As Matthew Jones has revealed, their 'preferred plan' called for quickly instigating an uprising in Syria before the communists could consolidate their hold, backed up by military intervention from Iraq and Jordan, supported by Turkey. Should the neighbouring Arab states prove to be unprepared for military action, the Working Group advocated an approach called 'containment plus', involving continued external pressure and internal harassment until such time as the moment for outside military intervention became more propitious.[22] Eisenhower's attempts to bolster the resolve of Syria's pro-Western neighbours by invoking the Eisenhower Doctrine and stepping up the flow of military supplies proved fruitless, however. Indeed, as it became apparent that Iraqi public opinion would not countenance military action against Syria and that any Turkish military moves would arouse widespread Arab opposition and possibly provoke Soviet military intervention, the Eisenhower administration fell back on 'containment plus'.[23]

Ultimately, inter-Arab diplomacy rather than 'containment plus' resolved the immediate crisis, although not in the way American policymakers had envisaged. King Saud briefly seemed to fulfil the promise of regional leader envisioned by the Americans when he travelled to Lebanon, Jordan and eventually Syria to mediate differences among the regional powers and emphasize the solidarity of the Arab peoples behind the preservation of Syrian sovereignty. Just as Saud appeared to be finally assuming the role of Arab statesman, however, Nasser dramatically upstaged him in mid-October by sending a small Egyptian military force to Syria, instantly reclaiming his mantle as the pre-eminent Arab leader.[24] Nasser's bold action significantly strengthened the resolve of the Syrian Baathists, and early in 1958, Baath military officers pressed Nasser for union with Egypt to forestall a possible communist coup, culminating in the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) under Nasser's leadership. Thus, Nasser emerged from the affair with a greatly enhanced strategic position, sitting astride the Saudi and Iraqi oil pipelines that flowed through Syria and having secured Egyptian predominance in the long-running inter-Arab contest for control over Syria.[25]

Although the Eisenhower administration proved unable to use the Eisenhower Doctrine to resolve the Syrian crisis in a satisfactory manner, Dulles was encouraged by the degree of Anglo-American consultation and co-operation evident during the affair and eagerly welcomed further moves in that direction following the Soviet

22 Matthew Jones, 'The "Preferred Plan": The Anglo-American Working Group Report on Covert Action in Syria, 1957', *Intelligence and National Security*, 19/3 (2004): 404–9; see also Stephen Blackwell, 'Britain, the United States and the Syrian Crisis, 1957', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 11/3 (2003): 139–58.

23 Nigel John Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955–59* (New York, 1996), pp. 128–9.

24 David W. Lesch, 'Gamal Abd al-Nasser and an Example of Diplomatic Acumen', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31/2 (1995): 362–74.

25 Memo of 352nd meeting NSC, 22 January 1958, AWF, NSC Series, Box 9, DDEL.

Union's launch of Sputnik in October, 1957. For his part, Macmillan shrewdly used the furore over the Soviet space satellite to make a strong case for greater allied pooling of resources to meet the Soviet Cold War challenge, and not incidentally, reaffirming the Anglo-American 'special relationship'. Macmillan's summit meeting with Eisenhower in Washington in late October resulted in, among other things, commitments to institutionalize a series of joint planning ventures in the Middle East based on the precedent of the Syrian Working Group.[26] Nevertheless, despite the much-publicized 'Declaration of Common Purpose', British and American views on the Middle East and the nature of the Anglo-American partnership were not entirely in accord. The Eisenhower administration remained wary of too close an association, at least in public, with what many Arabs considered to be the leading imperialist power.[27] Similarly, whilst Eisenhower and Dulles generally welcomed the institutionalization of Anglo-American consultation, they perceived it as the first stage of a larger strategy of integrating all members of the Western alliance more thoroughly, whereas the British saw this as a step towards re-establishing the exclusive, combined Anglo-American planning arrangements of the Second World War. Consequently, when the joint working groups and planning committees set about their work on such topics as Syria, Lebanon and reducing Western dependence on Middle Eastern oil, the Americans usually insisted on maintaining their freedom of action and the planning rarely proceeded as far as the British would have liked.[28]

Meanwhile, by late 1957 and early 1958, lower-level officials within the Eisenhower administration were beginning to rethink overall American policy towards the Middle East. The Syrian crisis had painfully exposed the limitations of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Conservative Arab regimes had failed to take decisive action against Syria. Indeed, intelligence officials warned that many Arabs saw the doctrine as evidence that the United States was obsessed with communism rather than what they saw as the more pressing problems confronting the region, namely the smouldering Arab–Israeli conflict, residual Western imperialism, and economic and political inequities. Moreover, the Eisenhower Doctrine went against the grain of the traditional Arab preference for neutrality in the Cold War, and by threatening direct American military intervention, seemed to risk bringing the Third World War to the region. Equally troubling was the dawning realization that, much as the

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26 Stephen J. Blackwell, 'A Transfer of Power? Britain, the Anglo-American Relationship and the Cold War in the Middle East, 1957–1962', in Michael F. Hopkins, Michael D. Kandiah and Gillian Staerck (eds), *Cold War Britain, 1945–1964: New Perspectives* (New York, 2003), pp. 172–3; CAB 128/31/2, CC76(57)2, Report by Macmillan, Cabinet conclusions, 28 October 1957, cited in Ronald Hyam and Wm. Roger Louis (eds), *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire, 1957–1964, Part II: Economics, International Relations, and the Commonwealth* (London, 2000), pp. 237–9.

27 Staff Study on the Near East, NSC 5801, 16 January 1958, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 23, NSC 5801/1 (2), DDEL; OCB Progress Report on the Near East (NSC 5428), 7 August 1957, WHO, NSC Staff Papers, Disaster File, Box 64, Near East (10), DDEL.

28 Matthew Jones, 'Anglo-American Relations after Suez, the Rise and Decline of the Working Group Experiment, and the French Challenge to NATO, 1957–1959', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 14/1 (2003): 53–8.

Baghdad Pact had become an object of domestic Arab politics, pitting conservative pro-Westerners against Arab nationalists, the Eisenhower Doctrine seemed to be having the same polarizing effect.[29]

Surveying the scene in early 1958, Robert Cutler, Eisenhower's National Security Adviser, warned that current trends in the Middle East were 'unfavorable to Western interests; United States and Western influence has declined while Soviet influence has greatly increased'.[30] Officials within the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs ascribed Western difficulties primarily to the failure of the United States to identify with legitimate Arab nationalist aspirations while the Soviets, without any stake in the political and economic status quo, had proclaimed their unconditional support for Arab unity. In the Arab popular mind, particularly among 'the growing semi-educated urban elements', Israel posed a greater threat to Arab interests than international communism, but despite the administration's efforts to pursue a 'more balanced approach' to the Arab–Israeli conflict than its predecessor, continued private American support for Israel and American efforts to secure a peace that ensured Israel's continued existence reinforced the perception that the United States deliberately sought to keep the Arab world divided. The Arab sense that the United States intended to divide and dominate the area was heightened by American identification with repressive, pro-Western rulers and 'reactionary elements'. In addition, the continuing US commitment to its NATO allies with colonial holdings in the region further aroused anti-American feelings. Although the British now appeared more amenable to full consultation and co-operation with the United States, and might possibly make concessions to nationalist sentiments, France had become 'an albatross around the neck of the Western World in the Near East' for its wholehearted support of Israel and the ongoing war in Algeria. The latter conflict so inflamed the Arab world that not even the most pro-Western Arab leaders could risk demanding anything short of Algerian independence.[31] In short, area experts were beginning to grapple with the problem of redefining American Middle Eastern policy to safeguard vital strategic and economic interests by more forthrightly accommodating the demands of the dominant political force in the region, Arab nationalism.

The first few months of 1958 provided several indications that the Eisenhower administration was wrestling with the pressures of Arab nationalism and even reconsidering its formerly implacable resistance to Nasser. Although Dulles's initial reaction to the creation of the UAR was hostile, a view echoed by the British and the Iraqis, the anti-communist nature of the union led the administration to pursue a somewhat circumspect policy towards the new republic. Conscious of the wide appeal of the union across the Arab world, the United States formally recognized the UAR in February. At the same time, the administration leant its support to King Hussein's

29 National Intelligence Estimate, 8 October 1957, *FRUS, 1955–57*, vol. XII, p. 609; United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East, 30 October 1957, ibid., p. 623.

30 Cutler briefing note, 21 January 1958, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII (Washington, 1993), p. 14.

31 Staff Study on NSC 5801, Long-Range U.S. Policy Toward the Near East, 16 January 1958, WHO, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 23, NSC 5801/1 (2), DDEL.

scheme for a rival federation of Arab monarchies that resulted in the short-lived Arab Union between Jordan and Iraq under King Faisal. As the Arab cold war between the conservatives and the Nasserists heated up, and King Saud was forced to surrender many of his powers to Crown Prince Faisal in a palace coup following revelations of his involvement in a botched plot against Nasser, the Eisenhower administration continued to support its conservative friends with military and economic aid, but refrained from overtly wielding the threat of military intervention. When the Suez Canal Company reached a settlement with Nasser, moreover, the Americans even opened the door to a possible accommodation with the Egyptian leader.[32] The softer line towards Nasser continued into May, when Lebanese President Camille Chamoun, whose manoeuvring to extend his presidency prompted a civil war in which his opponents received Nasser's backing, indicated that he might soon request American military support under the auspices of the Eisenhower Doctrine. However, the administration expressed reluctance to become directly involved in Lebanon's internal politics, tried to dissuade Chamoun from making a formal request, and undertook secret negotiations with Nasser to resolve the affair.[33]

The 14 July overthrow of the pro-Western regime in Baghdad dramatically altered the Eisenhower administration's perception of events in Lebanon and across the region. The Free Officers movement within the Iraqi Army seized power and murdered the Hashemite dynasty and Anglophile Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, and a brief outburst of street violence against the regime's former supporters and Western interests in Baghdad followed. Immediately assuming that Nasser was behind the revolution, and with the Saudi and Jordanian monarchs pressing for Western military intervention to halt the revolutionary ferment, Eisenhower responded quickly to Chamoun's renewed appeal for American military intervention.[34] For Eisenhower, the crisis represented a crucial test of American credibility in support of a loyal ally who had warmly embraced the Eisenhower Doctrine and stoutly maintained a pro-Western orientation. Failure to respond to Chamoun's desperate plea, Eisenhower and Dulles believed, would erode confidence among friendly regimes across the region. While much of the Arab world might be inflamed by American military intervention, decisive action would at least reassure the Northern Tier states and communicate American resolve to the Soviets. For Eisenhower, it was time to 'act or get out of the Middle East … To lose this area by inaction would be far worse than the loss of China because of the strategic position and resources of the Middle East.'[35] The first marines went ashore in Lebanon the next day.

From the outset, however, fissures appeared in the Anglo-American response to the crisis. In the British view, the Iraqi coup and Chamoun's domestic difficulties

32 Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism*, pp. 188–201; Rountree to Dulles, 24 March 1958, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, pp. 48–54.

33 Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan, and the Problem of Nasser*, pp. 154–64.

34 Allen Dulles briefing notes, 14 July 1958, WHO, Office of the Staff Secretary Records, International Series, Box 12, Middle East-Lebanon (1) (16–23 July 1958), DDEL.

35 Goodpaster memo of conference with the President, 14 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XI (Washington, DC, 1992), pp. 211–15; Douglas Little, 'His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis', *Diplomatic History*, 20/1 (1996): 27–54.

were part of Nasser's larger plot to spread his brand of radical pan-Arab nationalism, subvert pro-Western regimes, and eliminate the remaining British presence in the region. Macmillan therefore pressed Eisenhower to undertake a broader, joint effort to secure Western interests throughout the Middle East, but Eisenhower and Dulles refused to be drawn into such an open-ended enterprise and used the pretext of constitutional constraints to sidestep British entreaties. The administration did approve low-key Anglo-American military precautions to safeguard the vital Persian Gulf oil area, particularly Kuwait. Nevertheless, Eisenhower set aside recently completed Anglo-American contingency plans for joint intervention in Lebanon in favour of unilateral action, partly to avoid the appearance of acting in defence of colonial interests, and also to forestall possible French demands to be party to any joint Western expedition. Instead, he gave half-hearted backing to the British military intervention in Jordan to stave off an alleged coup against King Hussein, but repeated pleas from the monarch and the British for at least a token American ground force in Jordan failed to extract more than logistical support and a few ostentatious overflights by jet fighters.[36]

Significantly, even as the first American and British forces landed in Lebanon and Jordan to provide short-term security, the widespread popular hostility in the Arab world to renewed Western military intervention prompted the Eisenhower administration to revisit the question of long-term strategy towards the region.[37] Several members of the administration employed hydrological metaphors to describe the force of Arab nationalism, variously characterizing it as a 'flood', a 'mighty river', a 'tide' or an 'overflowing stream', suggesting that it would be futile to stand in its way and that American policy had to adapt to such a powerful force of nature.[38] In a moment of telling self-criticism, Dulles acknowledged that the pro-Western government of Iraq had been overthrown because of its 'unnatural' association with the Baghdad Pact rather than with 'the Arabs of the south'. Whilst refusing to abandon vital interests for the sake of courting popularity, Eisenhower nevertheless insisted that 'we want to get indigenous peoples as well as governments on our side if possible', otherwise American policies 'would stand on a foundation of sand'.[39]

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36 Goodpaster memo of conference with the President, 15 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XI, p. 245; Memos of Dulles telephone calls to Eisenhower, 15 July 1958, ibid., pp. 241, 251; Memos of conversations, Department of State, 17 July 1958, ibid., pp. 319–21; Reinhardt memo of conversation, White House, 17 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, pp. 76–7; Report of telephone call between the President and Prime Minister Macmillan, 14 July 1958, and Conversation between the President and Prime Minister, 14 July 1958, in E. Bruce Geelhoed and Anthony O. Edmonds (eds), *The Macmillan–Eisenhower Correspondence, 1957–1969* (New York, 2005), pp. 156–61.

37 Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) 30-2-58, 22 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, pp. 87–93.

38 Goodpaster memo of conference with the President, 23 July 1958, ibid., pp. 98–100; Discussion at 373rd meeting of NSC, 14 July 1958, AWF, NSC Series, Box 10, folder: 373rd Meeting NSC, DDEL; Memo of discussion at 374th meeting of NSC, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, p. 129.

39 Discussion at 373rd meeting of NSC, 14 July 1958, AWF, NSC Series, Box 10, folder: 373rd Meeting NSC, DDEL; Gerard C. Smith, Assistant Secretary of State for Policy

He noted that the prime reason for Nasser's success was his 'capture of Arab loyalty and enthusiasm throughout the region'.[40]

The Eisenhower administration formally unveiled its new regional strategy, NSC 5820/1, in late 1958. Explicitly acknowledging Arab nationalism as the dominant force in the region, it noted that Western interests were most threatened 'not by Arab nationalism per se but from the coincidence of many of its objectives with those of the USSR' and its susceptibility to manipulation by the Soviets. The policy paper therefore tried to reconcile vital American interests with political realities. The administration identified two 'bedrock objectives': denial of the area to Soviet domination, and securing the availability of Middle Eastern oil to Western Europe 'on reasonable terms'. Departing from the previous policy paper, the administration now attached a lower order of importance to maintaining Western military facilities and transit rights and to resolving the Arab–Israeli conflict, issues that were unlikely to engender Arab sympathy. Conceding that American efforts to build up conservative Arab bulwarks had largely failed, the administration prepared to adopt a lower profile in the region and gradually disengage from Lebanon and Jordan. A political settlement in the former, whereby Chamoun agreed not to seek re-election, calmed the situation sufficiently to allow for the withdrawal of American forces in October, and King Hussein's surprising resilience enabled the British to leave Jordan shortly after. Finally, recognizing that previous efforts to force Arab leaders to align themselves with the West in the Cold War flew in the face of the Arab preference for non-involvement in the East–West conflict, the administration deigned to 'accept neutralist policies' in the region when necessary.[41]

With regard to Anglo-American relations and the Western alliance in the region, the United States would assume 'major responsibility for providing Free World leadership', but envisioned a division of labour by supporting 'a continued substantial British position in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula with particular reference to the Sheikdoms'. Whilst the new policy stressed the importance of Anglo-American consultation and co-operation and the need to 'achieve and maintain harmony', particularly with regard to securing continuing Western access to vital oil supplies, the United States reserved the right to act alone in defence of American objectives when necessary. Significantly, in cases where Arab nationalist aspirations conflicted with the interests of NATO allies, the United States would seek to 'persuade the NATO governments of the advantages' of working constructively with Arab nationalism.[42] A practical application of the new American approach occurred the following month, when the United States refused to vote against an Afro-Asian resolution in the United Nations General Assembly recognizing Algeria's right to independence,

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Planning, 'Factors in the Backwash of Lebanon', 18 July 1958, John Foster Dulles Papers, Gerard Smith Series, Box 1, Material from Gerard C. Smith's Files 1958 (2), DDEL.

40 Eisenhower to Humphrey, 22 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, note 2, p. 81.

41 NSC 5820/1, US Policy Toward the Near East, 4 November 1958, ibid., pp. 187–90; ibid., pp. 145–52; discussion at 377th meeting NSC, 21 August 1958, AWF, NSC Series, Box 10, folder: 377th meeting NSC.

42 NSC 5820/1, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, p. 192; See also NSC Staff Study on NSC 5801, 16 January 1958, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 23, Folder: NSC 5801/1 (2), DDEL.

infuriating the French government and setting in train a series of Franco-American squabbles over the Western alliance.[43] Looking towards the future, by 1960 the NSC had identified Saudi Arabia and Iran as the two regional powers most likely to inherit Britain's traditional role in the Persian Gulf and Arabia. Ominously, in the case of the latter, the NSC staff also predicted that failure to implement domestic economic and political reforms could result in the Shah's overthrow, but the absence of a viable alternative made him 'the best hope for furthering U.S. interests in Iran'.[44]

The British, too, were not immediately enamoured with the greater flexibility in the American approach toward Arab nationalism and Nasser that became evident by late 1958, partly occasioned by developments in Iraq. There, Brigadier Abdel Karim Qasim, who had instigated the coup and become prime minister, confounded initial American expectations and pursued an independent line. Refusing to be drawn into Nasser's orbit and compromise control of Iraq's oil revenue, Qasim governed by undertaking a delicate and dangerous game of balancing between the two major political groupings, the nationalists and the communists. Initially favouring the latter, he signed his own arms and aid deals with the Soviet Union, incurring the wrath of Nasser and raising concerns in Washington about communist domination. By December, Nasser was offering to co-operate with the United States to resist communism in the region, and early the following year, Dulles proclaimed that Nasser was 'the lesser of two evils' compared with the communists.[45] Following an unsuccessful coup attempt by pro-Nasser army officers in Mosul, Qasim used communist militia units to brutally suppress the conspirators, prompting condemnation from Nasser and an open rift between Nasser and the Soviet Union.[46] As Nasser cracked down on domestic communists in Syria and Egypt, the UAR became the largest recipient of American food aid in the region.[47]

Despite reservations over Qasim's political leanings, meanwhile, the Eisenhower administration took to heart the recommendations of Near Eastern experts in the State Department who cautioned that the United States should reduce its presence in the region and allow indigenous nationalist forces to develop and take the lead in resisting threats to their independence, whether from communism or Nasserism.[48] Qasim's early reassurances that he would honour existing oil agreements and his initial refusal to jettison the Baghdad Pact soon persuaded Macmillan that it might be possible to work with him to safeguard British interests, particularly in Kuwait, and to provide a counter to Nasser.[49] The United States, too, quickly recognized the new regime, but in April

43 Matthew Connelly, 'Taking off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North–South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence', *American Historical Review*, 105/3 (2000): 762–3.

44 NSC 6010, US Policy toward Iran, 6 July 1960, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, pp. 680–88.

45 Discussion at 393rd meeting of NSC, 15 January, 1959, AWF, NSC Series, Box 11, 393rd Meeting of NSC, DDEL.

46 Discussion at 399th Meeting NSC, 12 March 1959, AWF, NSC Series, Box 11, 339th Meeting NSC, DDEL.

47 NSC 6010, Financial Appendix, 6 July 1960, WHO, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 29, NSC 6011-Near East, DDEL.

48 Rountree memo to Dulles, 27 December 1958, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, pp. 202–3.

49 Dulles memo of conversation, 22 March 1959, John Foster Dulles papers, White House Memoranda Series, Box 7, Meetings with the President, 1959 (1), DDEL.

1959, after Qasim seemed to swing decisively towards communism after the Mosul uprising and withdrew Iraq from the Baghdad Pact, the Eisenhower administration established an inter-agency group to monitor developments in Iraq and make policy recommendations. Given the murky political situation over the ensuing months, the group repeatedly counselled that the wisest course of action was for the United States to keep its hands out of Iraqi internal affairs, although CIA and Department of Defense representatives apparently favoured a more activist approach.[50] In part, this squared with the new emphasis on accommodating Arab nationalism and allowing Arabs to resolve their own political problems, but it also reflected the reality that, since the revolution, the United States had 'relatively few remaining assets in Iraq'.[51] Perhaps fortuitously, Qasim defied numerous coup and assassination attempts and the Eisenhower administration never had to confront the tricky problem of how to deal with his violent overthrow and the anticipated civil war between communists and various shades of nationalists. By 1960, as Qasim consolidated his hold, the United States enjoyed 'firm but friendly relations' with Iraq and benefited from the evolving balance of power between Nasser and Qasim.[52]

The new-found tolerance for allowing Arabs to resolve their own problems was facilitated by significant developments in the political economy of oil over which the United States exercised little direct control. After Suez, Anglo-American policymakers had agonized over the dependency of Western Europe on Middle Eastern oil, and had undertaken various measures to encourage new sources of supply and new means of transit that might reduce the vulnerability to Arab nationalism.[53] Securing Western access to Middle Eastern oil 'on reasonable terms' represented a bedrock principle in the new American strategy towards the region, and was considered so vital to Western Europe that the United States was 'prepared to use force' to achieve it, even at the risk of defying Arab nationalism.[54] By the late 1950s, however, oversupply rather than scarcity characterized the international oil market, and as prices declined, the major oil producers joined forces to attempt to establish common production and pricing guidelines, culminating in the formation

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50 G. Lewis Jones to Herter, (no date, but apparently 25 September 1959), WHO, NSC Staff Papers, Disaster File, Box 66, Iraq, DDEL; briefing note for NSC Meeting of 5 November 1959, 4 November 1959, ibid. For a more detailed, if necessarily speculative, discussion of possible covert action to avert a communist takeover, see Nathan J. Citino, 'Middle East Cold Wars: Oil and Arab Nationalism in U.S.–Iraqi Relations, 1958–1961', in Kathryn C. Statler and Andrew L. Johns (eds), *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War* (Lanham, MD, 2006), pp. 254–9.

51 Discussion at 393rd meeting NSC, 15 January 1959, AWF, NSC Series, Box 11, 393rd Meeting of NSC, DDEL.

52 OCB, Operations Plan for Iraq, 14 December 1960, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, vol. XII, p. 525; Discussion at 423rd meeting NSC, 5 November 1959, AWF, NSC Series, Box 11, 423rd Meeting NSC, DDEL; Discussion at 428th Meeting NSC, 10 December 1959, AWF, NSC Series, Box 12, 428th Meeting NSC, DDEL.

53 NSC 5714, US Policy on Protection and Conservation of Middle East Oil Resources and Facilities, 29 May 1957, WHO, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 21, NSC 5714-Middle East Oil, DDEL.

54 NSC 5820/1, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, pp. 188, 193.

of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) at Baghdad in September, 1960. As some American analysts had foreseen, the developing rift between Arab oil producers and non-producers seriously undermined the pan-Arab variant of nationalism espoused by Nasser and ultimately ensured continued Western access to Middle Eastern oil on acceptable terms.[55]

While benefiting from inter-Arab divisions and inching toward a *modus vivendi* with Nasser, the Eisenhower administration also made modest moves towards improving relations with Israel from their low point of early 1957. Given the unlikelihood of a comprehensive Arab–Israeli settlement in the near future and the failure to erect a conservative Arab barrier to radical nationalism, American planners began to reassess the strategic value of Israel as a pro-Western bastion.[56] Israel's growing military strength and undisguised territorial ambitions towards the West Bank served as a useful deterrent to Nasser's meddling with the status quo in Jordan, which by 1958, American strategists considered 'unviable' as an independent nation state but had not yet determined what should become of it. After the Iraqi revolution, the United States looked sympathetically on Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's efforts to develop an entente with Turkey, Iran, Sudan and Ethiopia to contain 'the Nasserist-Soviet torrent' on the outer perimeter of the Middle East.[57] Although the administration stopped short of the specific security guarantee Israel sought, Eisenhower reassured Ben-Gurion that the United States supported the independence and integrity of all nations in the Middle East, including Israel.[58] In 1958, Eisenhower authorized limited arms sales to Israel of defensive weapons, and the following year provided $100 million in technical and financial aid. Even American concern in late 1960 over the Israeli nuclear reactor at Dimona did not significantly dampen the improving Israeli–American relationship.[59]

By the time Eisenhower left office early in 1961, then, the United States had attained a more prominent role in the Middle East than ever before. After some initial stumbling, moreover, the Eisenhower administration had laid several of the foundations for American strategy towards the Middle East that would continue

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55 Nathan J. Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Saud, and the Making of U.S.–Saudi Relations* (Bloomington, IN, 2002), pp. 150–60; Memo of discussion at 460th Meeting NSC, 21 September 1960, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, pp. 275–6.

56 NSC Planning Board, Issues Arising out of the Situation in the Near East, 29 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958–60*, vol. XII, p. 119.

57 Ben-Gurion to Eisenhower, 24 July 1958, Dulles Papers, White House Memoranda Series, Box 7, White House Meetings with the President, 1 July 1958–31 December 1958 (9), DDEL.

58 Memo of conversation between Ben-Gurion and Eisenhower, 10 March 1960, WHO, OSS Records, International Series, Box 8, Israel (2), March–August, 1960, DDEL.

59 Abraham Ben-Zvi, *Decade of Transition: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Origins of the American–Israeli Alliance* (New York, 1998), pp. 83–93; Douglas Little, 'The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957–68', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25/4 (1993): 565–7. For a more pessimistic reading of US–Israeli relations drawing on Israeli sources, see Peter L. Hahn, 'The United States and Israel in the Eisenhower Era: The "Special Relationship" Revisited', in Statler and Johns (eds), *Eisenhower Administration*, pp. 225–43.

into the next decade. The Anglo-American rift over Suez was largely repaired, and the United States recognized the advantages of supporting continuing British predominance in the vital oil-producing areas of the Gulf and southern Arabia. Despite occasional disagreements, throughout the 1960s successive American administrations would actively encourage the British to remain engaged in the area.[60] As it became increasingly apparent that the British would ultimately withdraw from east of Suez, however, Eisenhower's successors took up his notion of working to promote Saudi Arabia and Iran as regional proxies to contain Soviet influence and check the more radical variant of Arab nationalism. Throughout the 1960s, both regimes received increasing quantities of advanced American military equipment and assistance, and when the British finally departed in the 1970s, President Richard Nixon pointed to Saudi Arabia and Iran as prime examples of how the Nixon Doctrine of supporting pro-Western regional proxies should work.

Eisenhower's effort to accommodate Arab nationalism would also continue, but the *modus vivendi* between the United States and Nasser did not last much beyond the John F. Kennedy administration. Efforts by means of generous food aid to steer Nasser towards internal development rather than fomenting radical revolution unravelled as Syria seceded from the UAR and Yemeni revolutionaries appealed for Egyptian military assistance. When Nasser reasserted himself as the focus of revolutionary Arab nationalism, relations with the United States soured. At the same time, Eisenhower's modest rapprochement with Israel blossomed into what Kennedy called a 'special relationship'.[61] Concerned that Israel might dramatically escalate the regional arms race by developing nuclear weapons, Eisenhower's Democratic successors tried to contain the danger by building up Israel's conventional forces and promising American assistance in the event that Israel was attacked. Such moves went far beyond what Eisenhower had considered wise, and essentially put paid to any 'balanced' American approach to the Arab–Israeli conflict. Ultimately, Israel developed nuclear weapons anyway, and the close American alignment with Israel once again facilitated the expansion of Soviet influence among Arab states in the region.

60 Simon C. Smith, 'Power Transferred? Britain, the United States, and the Gulf, 1956–71', *Contemporary British History*, 21/1 (2007): 1–23.

61 Little, 'The Making of a Special Relationship', p. 569.

Chapter 13

Telling Tales Out of School: Nutting, Eden and the Attempted Suppression of *No End of a Lesson*

Philip Murphy[1]

In 1967, Sir Anthony Nutting published *No End of a Lesson*, the first critical 'insider' account of the Suez crisis from the British perspective. Nutting had resigned as Minister of State at the Foreign Office in November 1956 in protest at the Suez operation, and his book remains a key source on Anglo-French-Israeli collusion. The fact that an official attempt was made to sanitize *No End of a Lesson* prior to its publication has long been known. Indeed, for Nutting, it was clearly something of a badge of honour that he had resisted this pressure. The inaugural edition of the journal *Contemporary Record* in 1987 contained a short article by Peter Hennessy about the genesis of Nutting's memoir.[2] Hennessy's piece was based largely on Nutting's own account of being summoned to the Cabinet Office in April 1967, shortly before the serialization of his book was due to begin in *The Times*. He recalled being confronted by Sir Burke Trend, the Cabinet Secretary, and Sir Paul Gore-Booth, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, who demanded sweeping cuts. Nutting stood his ground. Gore-Booth then asked whether he would remove 'one or two' passages in which 'he attributed views sympathetic to his own to named members of the Diplomatic Service, notably his private secretary, Sir Derek Dodson, and [former British Ambassador in Cairo] Sir Humphrey Trevelyan'. Nutting agreed. Rehearsing this episode in his 1989 book, *Whitehall*, Hennessy stated, rather more categorically, that Trend 'only succeeded in removing references to the views of a pair of diplomats, Sir Derek Dodson and Sir Humphrey Trevelyan'.[3] Yet had Hennessy glanced at the first volume of Alistair Horne's biography of Harold Macmillan, published in 1988, he would have noticed that Horne had quoted two extracts from an 'unexpurgated' copy of *No End of a Lesson*, neither of which referred to Dodson or Trevelyan.[4]

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1 Unpublished excerpts from the original proofs of *No End of a Lesson* appear by kind permission of Sir John Nutting.

2 Peter Hennessy, 'No End of an Argument: How Whitehall tried and failed to suppress Sir Anthony Nutting's Suez Memoir', *Contemporary Record*, 1/1 (1987): 12–13.

3 Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), p. 214.

4 Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan, Volume 1: 1894–1956* (London, 1988), pp. 432–3 (notes 106 and 112). These refer to the views of Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, collusion with the French and Israelis (given as p. 96), and to a Cabinet discussion on 24 October (given as p. 104). Curiously, however, Horne's references correspond to where these passages *would*

We are now able to compare this account with detailed documentary evidence on the vetting process, most notably from two Foreign Office files that were declassified in 2003.[5] They include pages from the original proofs of Nutting's book, and confirm that far more substantial revisions were made to it as a result of Trend's intervention than Hennessy had suggested. They also provide a fuller and more accurate account of the attitude to the book of the government of Harold Wilson. In many respects, this corresponds to the familiar comedy of manners characteristic of so many British 'official secrecy' cases. But aside from the intrinsic interest of some of the expurgated passages, the way in which officials approached the issue of Nutting's revelations says much about the uniquely sensitive nature of the Suez campaign itself.

A 'Minor Zinoviev Letter'

One important point to establish at the outset is that rumours of Nutting's intention to write an account of Suez reached Whitehall as early as the winter of 1965–66. Indeed, Trend discussed the matter with him on 19 January 1966, and Nutting confirmed that the rumours were true.[6] Trend therefore had plenty of time to contemplate the broader implications of Nutting's proposed account. In terms of presenting the issue to ministers, he was confronted with a number of problems. The first was to provide a clear rationale for intervention. Nutting's accusations were not directed at the Wilson government itself, but at the actions of a previous, Conservative administration, and at an operation which Labour front-benchers had bitterly criticized both at the time and subsequently. Nor did they threaten to damage the reputation of any particular government department or agency. Instead, they related to the decisions of a small cabal of senior ministers, acting behind the backs or against the wishes of most of their senior civil servants. Gore-Booth had himself been critical of the Suez adventure. As a Deputy Secretary at the Foreign Office at the time of the Suez crisis, he had submitted a memorandum to the then Permanent Secretary, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, describing the 'dismay' caused within the department by the government's actions.[7]

For both Trend and Gore-Booth, this raised the question of whose interests they were serving in seeking to suppress Nutting's allegations. If one of their answers was that they were attempting to protect the reputation of the British government *as a whole* in terms of its conduct of international affairs, then a second problem

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have appeared in the published version of the book rather than to the page numbers where they *do* appear in the uncorrected proofs available in the National Archives. This raises the possibility that Horne's copy of the book was already partially expurgated.

5 These are FCO 12/29–30. Two, less revealing files on the affair from the Prime Ministers Office and the Cabinet Office (PREM 13/1556 and CAB 164/65 respectively) were released in 1998 after the standard 30-year closure period.

6 Nutting to Trend, 3 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29; minute by Gore-Booth, 7 March 1966, TNA, FCO 12/29.

7 Hennessy, *Whitehall*, pp. 165–6. Gore-Booth provided a succinct summary of his own attitude to revelations about Suez when commenting in August 1966 on the draft of an article by General Sir Hugh Stockwell about the affair: 'One's instinctive reaction is that the less said about Suez the better'; Gore-Booth to Tower, 26 Aug 1966, TNA, CAB 103/617.

arose, namely that by the end of 1966, convincing evidence of collusion was already in the public domain. In 1964, books were published by Henri Azeau, Herman Finer and Michel Bar-Zohar which provided important new evidence about the secret manoeuvring over Suez.[8] These were supplemented in 1965 by two further important works: *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy*, written by Terence Robertson, apparently with the blessing of Lester Pearson, the Canadian Minister for External Affairs at the time of Suez, and *Diary of the Sinai Campaign 1956*, published originally in Hebrew by Israeli Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan.[9] The tenth anniversary of the Suez crisis in 1966 encouraged a further wave of revelations. Dayan's book was published in English in April. In July, the former French Foreign Minister, Christian Pineau, interviewed on the BBC confirmed the existence of an Anglo-French-Israeli 'treaty'.[10] In September, Hugh Thomas published a series of articles in *The Sunday Times*, piecing together the story of Suez from interviews and publicly available accounts; and in November, Ben-Gurion's biographer, Michel Bar-Zohar, provided the *Daily Telegraph* with a detailed account of the meetings at Sèvres, and of the drafting of the tripartite agreement on 24 October 1956.[11] Nutting would claim that the appearance of the English edition of Dayan's book had encouraged him to proceed with his own.[12]

This spate of publications reignited party-political controversy around Suez in a way which provided a third difficulty for civil servants in deciding how to handle Nutting's book. Answering a question in the Commons from the Labour MP Michael Foot about Dayan's memoir, Wilson said:

> I think that recent publications both from Canadian and Israeli sources suggest that there is nothing left to learn about what the Right Honourable and Learned Gentleman (Selwyn Lloyd) did, and all that we are waiting for is for him or one of his colleagues to come to the House and admit that the House was seriously misled in 1956 with the inaccurate statements made on that occasion.[13]

Nutting himself drew encouragement from this and similar statements by Wilson, and was subsequently to quote them back at Trend when seeking to justify his decision to go ahead with his own memoir.[14] Yet they presented civil servants with a dilemma, about what, if anything to tell Labour ministers about Nutting's plans. This problem became particularly acute when, on 28 February 1966, Wilson called a general election. Gore-Booth recommended that ministers should not be told about Nutting's proposed book before the election took place. He explained: 'If the Labour Party wished to produce in the Election arguments about Suez, publicly available

8 Henri Azeau, *Le Piège de Suez* (Paris, 1964); Herman Finer, *Dulles over Suez* (London, 1964), and Michel Bar-Zohar, *Suez Ultra Secret* (Paris, 1964).

9 Geoffrey Warner, '"Collusion" and the Suez Crisis of 1956', *International Affairs*, 55/2 (1979): 228, note 14.

10 *Observer*, 24 July 1966.

11 *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 November 1966.

12 Minute by Gore-Booth, 7 March 1966, TNA, FCO 12/29.

13 *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 724, 10 February 1966, cols 614–15.

14 Nutting to Trend, 3 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

information was ammunition enough. I felt that a kind of minor Zinoviev letter ought not to be injected into an election in which the electorate had quite enough contemporary matter [*sic*] to discuss.'[15] With the election out of the way, the party-political dispute over Suez did not abate. Further revelations in 1966 led Foot to table a Ten Minute Rule bill in November, seeking to establish an inquiry into the affair. The Foreign Secretary, George Brown, was hostile to this idea, and the Leader of the House, Richard Crossman, was worried that it might expose the government to the accusation that it was 'diverting attention from the modern scene to ancient history'.[16] Nevertheless, Crossman was content 'to keep the threat of the inquiry hanging over the Tories'. It would be difficult for Trend to discuss Nutting's account in front of members of the Wilson government without risking the accusation that he was providing them with political ammunition against the Opposition.

In seeking to negotiate this political minefield, Trend positioned himself as a bridge between the Wilson government and the surviving senior members of the 'inner circle' of Conservative ministers who had been privy to details of collusion in the Suez crisis. He told Nutting, in his first letter to him about the book, that it would be up to ministers *past and present* to decide the matter.[17] Indeed, Trend was clear throughout that he was acting, at least in part, on behalf of Sir Anthony Eden (by that stage Lord Avon) and his former colleagues (who were alerted of Nutting's intentions over a year before members of the Wilson government). Shortly after Nutting's book had begun to be serialized, Avon complained about a story in *The Sunday Times*, which suggested that 'former ministers' had attempted to prevent publication. Trend pointedly responded: 'it could be argued that the action which had been taken in interviewing Mr Nutting and his publisher and in writing to him had been done not only at the instance [*sic*] of the Government but also on behalf of the former Administration'.[18] He refused Avon's request for an official statement refuting the story.

Although Trend made the occasional reference to the Official Secrets Act in his correspondence with Nutting, he never seriously threatened prosecution. Instead, he relied principally on Avon's 'inner circle' to police the issue. On one hand, it is difficult to escape the impression that Trend believed they had a moral responsibility to relieve the current administration of a dilemma which was very much of their own making. More tangibly, Trend clearly felt that informal pressure and ties of personal loyalty, rather than the threat of litigation, would prove most effective in suppressing the book. If this could be done without the need to involve ministers in the affair at all, then so much the better. At their first meeting in January 1966, Trend had urged Nutting to discuss the matter with some of his former colleagues in the Eden government, suggesting that he owed 'a certain loyalty' to them.[19]

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15 Minute by Gore-Booth, 7 March 1966, TNA, FCO 12/29.

16 Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Volume 2: Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, 1966–68* (London, 1976), p. 129 (16 November 1966).

17 Trend to Nutting, 3 February 1966, TNA, FCO 12/29.

18 Note by Reid, 2 May 1967, TNA, FCO 12/30.

19 Minute by Gore-Booth, 7 March 1966, TNA, FCO 12/29.

Nutting subsequently spoke to Harold Macmillan, who apparently tried to dissuade him from publication (just as he had successfully dissuaded Nutting from making a parliamentary statement following his resignation in 1956). Macmillan apparently told him 'that it would also be far more useful, dignified, etc. if he published something rather broader in its consideration of the Middle East question, rather than more spicy revelations about Suez'.[20] In the case of Macmillan, Nutting's assumed ties of loyalty were not only to a former ministerial colleague and party leader. In February 1967, Macmillan had a further conversation with Nutting at Trend's behest to try to discover what he could about the progress of the manuscript. Describing this meeting to his senior colleagues at the Foreign Office, Gore-Booth noted that:

> A further somewhat obscure remark by Mr Nutting had been to the effect that 'he would show [*sic*] the manuscript or the proofs to someone'. (I should observe that 'to show up' is a 'school-ism' which has the implication of handing in something to a superior authority, e.g. a form master.)[21]

The 'school' in question, was of course Eton College, which Nutting, Gore-Booth, Macmillan and Avon had all attended. Again, one detects a somewhat desperate hope that the complex bonds of establishment loyalties – of which education was a key socializing element – would ensure Nutting's discretion.

'So Many People Keep Diaries These Days'

Such hopes, however, proved ill-founded. Towards the end of March 1967, the Foreign Office received confirmation that the book was already in page-proof form.[22] Writing to Trend on 3 April to defend his decision to publish and to enclose copies of the proofs, Nutting revealed that *The Times* was due to begin serializing the work on 29 April.[23] Trend replied that he was sending copies of the proofs simultaneously to Macmillan (Avon being abroad at the time) and to the present government. He warned Nutting that, having read the book, 'it seems to me to involve, to put it no more strongly at this stage, a departure from the normal conventions in matters of this kind which Ministers, of whatever Party political complexion, may find it difficult to accept'.[24] Trend only informed Wilson about the memoir on 8 April. He was clearly embarrassed at having to admit to the Prime Minister that he had known of Nutting's intentions for over a year.[25] In a note which he appended to his minute to the Prime Minister, he told Wilson: 'You will not misunderstand me when I say that I have found it extremely difficult to write and that I have done my best throughout

20 Ibid.

21 Minute by Gore-Booth, 2 March 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29. In his own record of this conversation (Note by Macmillan, 21 February 1967, Lord Avon Papers (AP) 20/49/30) Macmillan specified Trend as the 'someone' to whom the manuscript or proofs would be shown.

22 Minute by Butler, 30 March 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

23 Nutting to Trend, 3 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

24 Trend to Nutting, 7 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

25 Trend to Wilson, 8 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

this affair to concentrate on what I believe to be my official duty without any regard to Party political advantage or disadvantage, either way.'[26]

In setting out his thinking on the matter for the Prime Minister, Trend was careful not to enter into a discussion of the accuracy of the book. Instead, he repeated what he had already told Nutting in February 1966: that the work would have to be judged principally in terms of whether it breached the doctrine of collective responsibility and whether it risked compromising current national interests.[27] On the latter point, he told Wilson that the Foreign Office found it objectionable on two grounds: first, that 'the story that it tells cannot but reflect adversely upon the methods by which we may be thought to practise diplomacy and upon our general probity in our relations with other countries', and that, in particular, 'it cannot improve our relations with the United States, France and the United Arab Republic'; second, that it identified by name several members of the Diplomatic Service, most of whom were still serving. On the issue of Cabinet confidentiality, Trend advised that the book represented a breach in the Privy Councillor's Oath and 'almost certainly' of the Official Secrets Act (although he admitted that he had not yet taken advice on this issue). So far as the Oath was concerned, to ignore this violation would 'in effect be acquiescing not merely in a continuing insult to the Crown but also in the creation of a precedent which could do very grave damage to the standards of public life in this country'. Trend noted that minor amendments could not adequately deal with these objections, and that 'the book must be taken as a whole and either published as it stands or not published at all'. He added that 'even if this were not true as a matter of practical feasibility, the point of principle would make it desirable to take this line'. Since the events described in Nutting's book related to a previous administration, Trend expressed the hope that Wilson would feel able to discuss the matter with Macmillan.

Having read the relevant chapters of the proofs, Wilson was rather dismissive of the argument that the book might damage Britain's relations with France, the US and the United Arab Republic (UAR).[28] He told Trend that de Gaulle would probably be 'loftily contemptuous' of Mollet and the Fourth Republic generally, that the Americans would not be 'unduly upset', and that Nasser would 'hardly be likely to be more intransigent (even if he were capable of it) and it might even get him thankful that he was dealing with a non-Suez Government in Britain'. On Trend's point about the naming of civil servants, Wilson claimed that he did not think they 'come out of it at all badly – rather the reverse'.

What Wilson *was* concerned about was the precedent that would be set if Nutting's book was allowed to appear. He had already had experience of the political embarrassment that could be caused by former Labour ministers going into print. His letter to Trend referred in passing to the case of Sir Christopher Mayhew, who, after his resignation as Minister for the Navy the previous year, had written a highly critical book about British defence policy, which had been serialized in *The Sunday Times*.[29] He complained more obliquely that 'so many people keep diaries these days',

26 Note to Wilson from Trend, 8 April 1967, TNA, PREM 13/1556.

27 Trend to Wilson, 8 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

28 Wilson to Trend, 10 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

29 *The Times*, 3 October 1966.

and suggested that damage that could be done 'by someone even more unscrupulous, and more speedy with his pen than Nutting'. Both these comments were interpreted by the Foreign Secretary, George Brown, as references to Richard Crossman, who was known to keep a diary.[30]

Wilson not only agreed to discuss the matter with Macmillan, but also offered to see the current leader of the Conservative Party, Edward Heath. He was pessimistic about the government's capacity to suppress the book, and was clearly keen to implicate the Conservatives as deeply as possible in what was likely to be a controversial course of action. Wilson subsequently told both Avon and Heath that it was unlikely that effective action could be taken against the book on the grounds of breaches of either the Official Secrets Act or Nutting's Privy Councillor's Oath. Heath suggested that, instead of making an attempt to halt publication altogether, the government should indicate which passages it wished to be amended or omitted: 'If, as a result, the amendments and omissions were many and extensive and nothing of the book really remained at the end, that would be Mr Nutting's responsibility.'[31] In his subsequent meeting with Avon, Wilson commended this approach to him, and Avon agreed with it.

Avon was shown the proofs and provided Trend with a detailed set of comments.[32] From the Cabinet Secretary's perspective, these were far from helpful. As Trend subsequently made clear to Gore-Booth, he was determined that the government should not get involved in a dispute with Nutting over questions of fact.[33] Clearly, he did not want the government to be seen to be implicitly confirming the accuracy of those parts of Nutting's book which it did not seek to alter. Avon's notes challenged Nutting on some quite minor factual issues. Yet, crucially, they made no comment about the section of the proofs between pages 66 and 80 (effectively from pages 82 to 96 in the book as eventually published, including most of chapters 9 and 10). This contained the key allegations of collusion with the French and Israelis, including Nutting's description of the meeting at Chequers on 14 October with the French representatives Maurice Challe and Albert Gazier.[34] From Trend's point of view, this represented the worst of both worlds. Needless to say, Avon's comments were never passed to Nutting.

When Trend himself wrote to Nutting on 17 April, he stuck to four questions of principle: first, that passages affecting 'security' would have to be altered or omitted; second, that the attribution of private views to named members of the diplomatic service represented a departure from convention; third, that – read as a whole – the book was likely to damage British diplomatic relations, and fourth, that – again, read as a whole – the book represented a serious breach of the principle of collective ministerial responsibility.[35] Trend claimed that while it would be relatively simple to alert Nutting to the passages relating to the first two points, it would take longer

30 Brown's notes in the margin of Wilson to Trend, 10 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.
31 Minute by Trend, 12 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.
32 Avon to Trend, 14 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.
33 Minute by Gore-Booth, 18 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.
34 Avon to Trend, 14 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.
35 Trend to Nutting, 17 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

to produce a list of the amendments which would be necessary to meet the final two objections. Clearly, the government hoped, at the very least, to buy time.

Nutting replied the same day. He claimed to be happy to accede to any alterations suggested under Trend's first heading, and on his second, suggested that the officials involved should be sent proofs and asked whether they objected to their characterization. Regarding Trend's final two points, however, Nutting was less amenable, noting that 'they could be taken as an attempt to suppress the book as a whole or to delay its publication indefinitely'.[36] He suggested that if his own book represented a departure from ministerial convention, the Suez affair itself was 'a "departure" from every convention which has guided and should guide the conduct of British diplomacy and Parliamentary responsibility throughout modern history'. Nutting indicated that the publication of the first extract of his book was likely to go ahead as planned on 29 April, and suggested an urgent meeting in order 'to reach a meeting of minds'.

Trend agreed to hold talks.[37] In the meantime, both the Foreign Office and the Cabinet Office drew up lists of objections to Nutting's book, and Rohan Butler, the Foreign Office's historical adviser, submitted a report comparing it with other published accounts of the Suez crisis.[38] Nutting arrived for a meeting with Trend and Gore-Booth at the Cabinet Office on the afternoon of Thursday 20 April accompanied by his publisher, Ben Glazebrook.[39] Glazebrook's appearance was unexpected, but after some brief consultations, he was allowed to stay. In the early stages of the meeting, Nutting and the officials rehearsed the arguments they had employed for and against publication respectively in their earlier correspondence. In line with the recommendations of senior officials at the Foreign Office who had discussed the matter the previous day, Trend and Gore-Booth made it clear that they wished to see the removal of the latter half of chapter 9 of the book and the whole of chapter 10.[40] Nutting objected that 'to remove this integral part of the story would be to completely ruin the book. Without this passage there would be no book and no revelation of the truth.' The meeting also discussed more detailed objections relating to the views and actions of named officials.[41] At no point, however, was Nutting given a copy of the consolidated list of objections which Trend and Gore-Booth had in front of them. Indeed, the following day, Trend told Nutting that no such list would be forthcoming unless Nutting agreed in advance to the deletion in its entirety of 'the passage which

36 Nutting to Trend, ibid.

37 Note by Reid, 19 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

38 Memorandum for Gore-Booth by Butler, 19 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29. For an account of Butler's role in the Foreign Office, see Peter J Beck, 'The lessons of Abadan and Suez for British policymakers in the 1960s', *Historical Journal*, 49/2 (2006): 525–47.

39 Nutting told Hennessy that the meeting took place on Friday 21 April; Hennessy, 'No End of an Argument', p. 12. In fact, the surviving minutes make clear that it occurred the previous day; Note of a meeting held in Sir Burke Trend's Room, Thursday 20 April, TNA, FCO 12/29.

40 Note of a meeting in the Permanent under-Secretary's Office, 19 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29.

41 Reid to Halls, 4 May 1967, enclosing 'Discussion of points of detail in Mr Nutting's book', TNA, FCO 12/30.

begins about half-way through Chapter 9 and extends through the whole of Chapter 10 and some way into Chapter 11, in which you give your own account of various developments in the Middle East culminating in certain discussions between the British, French and Israeli authorities'.[42]

'Could We Not Drop One Small Bomb On Israel Too?'

In the 1980s, Nutting told Peter Hennessy that, following this meeting, he had consulted an old friend, the former Attorney-General, Sir Lionel Heald. Heald had advised him to go ahead with publication, suggesting that the government would be extremely unwilling to bring a prosecution under the Official Secrets Act. Writing to Trend on 24 April, Nutting confirmed that he was not prepared to make the drastic cuts the government had demanded as this would serve 'to suppress the essential truth which is contained in my book'.[43] He also complained about Trend's refusal to let him have a detailed list of proposed amendments. He claimed, however, to have noted down most of the points of detail made at their meeting on 20 April. In making alterations to the text, he claimed to have followed three basic principles: first, he had omitted all descriptions of Cabinet meetings and the names of those involved; second, he had omitted details that could identify specific telegrams, and had removed altogether a reference to the doctoring of a telegram from Britain's ambassador in Israel; and third, he had removed the names of British officials who were still serving, even where they had not objected to being mentioned.

Two substantial sections which were removed from *No End of a Lesson* deserve particular attention. The first relates to a ministerial meeting convened at No. 10 on the morning of Tuesday 16 October 1956 to discuss the French plan set out by Challe at Chequers the previous Sunday. In the published version, Nutting referred to this only in passing and did not name those present. Richard Lamb's *The Failure of the Eden Government*, published in 1987, supplemented information from *No End of a Lesson* with an interview with Nutting to provide a slightly fuller account of the meeting. The original proofs of Nutting's book, however, contain a far more detailed description than that which appears either in the published version or in Lamb's book, including important information about the views of Macmillan and Lord Kilmuir, the Lord Chancellor.[44] In the proofs, Nutting claims that Eden's Private Secretary, Guy Millard, had been instructed to bring together Macmillan, Walter Monckton, Anthony Head (Monckton's successor as Minister of Defence), Alan Lennox-Boyd (the Colonial Secretary) and the Chiefs of Staff.[45] Nutting was to represent the Foreign Office in the place of Lloyd, who was on his way back

42 Trend to Nutting, 21 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/30.

43 Nutting to Trend, 24 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/30.

44 For an account of the meeting on 16 October, see Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson* (*NEL*) (London, 1967), p. 97, and proofs, pp. 79, 81–3, TNA, FCO 12/29.

45 Surprisingly, perhaps, the names of those attending this supposedly 'secret' meeting were carried the following day in the *Daily Telegraph*. The *Telegraph* claimed that Lord Home, the Commonwealth Secretary, also attended this meeting and named Templer as among those present (Warner, '"Collusion" and the Suez Crisis of 1956', p. 233).

from New York and who only arrived towards the end of the meeting. According to Nutting's original proofs:

> Eden opened the discussion with a full account of Sunday's meeting with Gazier and Challe. He did not mention Lloyd's negotiations with Fawzi in New York, concentrating exclusively on the Challe plan and making no attempt to disguise his enthusiasm for it. When he had finished, Macmillan was the first to speak. Ponderously, he intoned his belief that we should support the French and Israelis. Recourse to the UN, the Menzies mission and the Canal Users' Association had got us nowhere, he said. We must break out of the stalemate which we had reached, and the French plan, although fraught with difficulties and dangers which he did not minimise, seemed to offer the best way out. Lord Kilmuir followed with an even more unreserved acceptance of the Prime Minister's judgement. And for good measure, he added, speaking as Lord Chancellor, that we need have no qualms as to the legality of the operation! The Egyptians, with their fedayeen raids on Israel, had asked for what they were going to get, and Britain would be well within her rights in helping to see that they got it! My astonishment at this conclusion was only equalled by my amazement that a lawyer of such eminence should have vouchsafed a snap legal judgement on so momentous an issue without bothering to consider its implications.

Speaking for the Foreign Office, Nutting put a number of objections to the plan, pointing to the success of Lloyd's talks with Fawzi and urging consultation with Eisenhower. At this, according to Nutting, Eden exploded '"I will not bring the Americans into this … Dulles has done us enough damage as it is. This has nothing to do with the Americans. We and the French must decide what to do and we alone."' Only one minister present – Monckton – took Nutting's side.

It seems possible that Nutting showed this description of the meeting to Hugh Thomas. Thomas's original edition of the *Suez Affair*, published almost simultaneously with *No End of a Lesson* in 1967, mentions the meeting, but uses Eden's memoirs as the main source on it and gives no indication that collusion was discussed.[46] In the revised 1970 Pelican edition, however, Thomas states that in the course of the meeting, 'Macmillan and Kilmuir firmly backed the plan as presented by Challe and Gazier.'[47] Thomas does not provide a reference for this statement, but it so closely resembles the unpublished account provided by Nutting that he seems the most likely source. More intriguing is the use Alistair Horne made of Nutting's account in his authorized biography of Macmillan. As mentioned above, Horne appears to have access to an 'unexpurgated' copy of Nutting's book. Yet he makes no mention of the passage quoted above, despite the fact that it provides vital evidence about Macmillan's knowledge of and attitude towards collusion. Indeed, Horne makes no reference at all to the meeting on 16 October. He goes on to quote Robert Rhodes James's biography of Eden to the effect that 'Although Macmillan wholeheartedly supported virtually any means of bringing Nasser down, Eden did not confide in him any more than he did in Butler', and suggests that the first Macmillan learned of the planned collusion was on 24 October.[48] This is despite the fact that Nutting's

46 Hugh Thomas, *The Suez Affair* (London, 1967), pp. 105–6.

47 Hugh Thomas, *The Suez Affair* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 113.

48 Horne, *Harold Macmillan*, vol. 1, pp. 432–3. Rhodes James makes no mention of the ministerial meeting on 16 October in his biography of Eden.

original manuscript, and indeed the revised edition of Thomas's book, pointed to a very different conclusion.

The second substantial passage which was deleted was an anecdote about the doctoring of a telegram by Britain's Ambassador to Israel, Sir John Nicholls, which originally made up the first two pages of chapter 12, entitled 'Deceiving Our Allies'. Nutting claimed it had been agreed with the Israelis that they should make threatening manoeuvres against Jordan as a means of diverting international attention from the planned invasion of Egypt. As part of this charade, Nicholls was instructed to warn Ben-Gurion against any attack on Jordan. Nicholls himself, however, had not been briefed about collusion, and he therefore did so in all innocence. According to Nutting, Ben-Gurion replied 'that he was personally in touch with Paris and London, and that in a short while things would become clear to Nicholls which he was not in a position to clarify at the moment'. Nicholls included this cryptic remark in the record of the conversation which he telegraphed to London. When Nutting saw it, he realized that the telegram – which was likely to be distributed widely across Whitehall – would provide uninitiated ministers and officials with an unmistakable clue as to the government's secret policy. At that moment, his Private Secretary, Derek Dodson, appeared with a copy of the telegram from which Ben-Gurion's mysterious comment had been removed. According to Nutting:

> Dodson told me that instructions had been issued for all original copies of Nicholls's telegram to be withdrawn and an amended text, without Ben Gurion's revealing remarks, substituted.
>
> 'Who issued these instructions?' I asked.
>
> 'I understand it was No 10,' came the reply.
>
> As an old Foreign Office hand, Eden had also realised on reading the telegram that it would be seen by a very large number of people who knew nothing of our plans, but who would suspect the worst if the text were not edited. He was too late to prevent the original text being circulated in the Foreign Office, but at least he was able to prevent the rest of Whitehall guessing what he was up to.[49]

The removal of this long passage has a significant effect on the impact of the chapter as published, which, although beginning with a brief mention of the Israeli feint against Jordon, then concentrates solely on Eden's attempts to deceive Washington. In the proofs, the section quoted above about Nicholls's telegraph and the discussion of the withholding of information from Eisenhower is bridged by the sentence, 'These deceptions were not, of course, practised only on British Ministers and officials outside the Prime Minister's circle of intimates.' Nutting's treatment of Anglo-American relations therefore originally formed part of a discussion of a broader pattern of deception perpetrated by Eden.[50]

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49 Proofs, p. 98, TNA, FCO 12/29.

50 It is interesting to note that there is a further softening of the indictment against Eden in the published text. Whereas the section of chapter 12 dealing with the US begins, 'Nobody was more deliberately misled than the President of the United States,' the published version reads, 'Nobody was kept more completely in the dark than the President of the United States.'

The majority of the more minor changes Nutting made to the manuscript involved the removal of references to either Cabinet meetings or named officials. In the case of the former, some of the cuts had the effect of rendering the published narrative somewhat confusing. Hence, for example, in the proofs, Nutting refers to news of Dulles's press conference on 1 October (in which he distanced the United States from British and French policy) reaching 10 Downing Street in the course of a Cabinet meeting. In the published version, however, reference to the Cabinet meeting is removed, making it unclear why Nutting should have been privy to Eden's reaction to the news.[51] As for removing the names of officials, Nutting probably went further than was strictly necessary in terms of sparing embarrassment to those involved. As he had pointed out to Trend and Gore-Booth at their meeting on 20 April, he had cleared some of the passages with those named, including Trevelyan and Sir John Nicholls. Indeed, when he had written to Evelyn Shuckburgh in February, asking whether he would mind being mentioned in relation to Eden's reaction to the dismissal of Glubb, Shuckburgh had not only agreed in principle, but had offered to consult his own diaries over the issue.[52] Some of the deletions were distinctly tokenistic. Hence, for example, whereas in the proofs Nutting claims that 'the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Gerald Templer, pointed out that there were not enough troops' available to deal with an outbreak of unrest in Aden, in the published text the warning comes merely from 'the War Office'.[53] A reference to his Private Secretary, Derek Dodson, helping him to tone down his speech at the Conservative Party conference at Llandudno was removed.[54] Guy Millard, whilst named in the proofs, is referred to in the published version simply as Eden's 'Private Secretary'.[55] On one occasion, however, a more substantial cut was made to spare officials potential embarrassment. On page 96 of the published book, Nutting refers to a meeting on 15 October with two unnamed senior Foreign Office officials. He notes having briefed them on the Gazier-Challe visit, and records that 'The more we discussed the French scheme, the less we could see a single argument in favour of going along with this sordid manoeuvre.' He then describes a number of objections to the plan, but does not attribute these to either official. In the proofs, Nutting identifies the two officials as Ivone Kirkpatrick, the Permanent Under-Secretary, and Archie Ross, the Assistant Under-Secretary responsible for the Middle East. He goes on to record their individual reactions:

> Ross, normally an unemotional down-to-earth type was clearly horrified and shocked that a British Prime Minister, and most of all Anthony Eden, should have entertained for one moment such a proposition. Besides, he pointed out that it could not possibly work and, if we went through with it, we would lose all our friends in the Arab world and probably our

51 *NEL*, pp. 69–70, and proofs, pp. 53–4, TNA, FCO 12/29.

52 Nutting to Shuckburgh, 24 February 1967; Shuckburgh to Nutting, 6 March 1967, Papers of Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, Birmingham University Special Collections, MS 191/2/7, fols 38–41.

53 *NEL*, p. 37, and proofs, p. 21, TNA, FCO 12/29.

54 *NEL*, p. 82, and proofs, p. 66, TNA, FCO 12/29.

55 *NEL*, pp. 90, 92, and proofs, pp. 75, 76, TNA, FCO 12/29.

> oil as well. Kirkpatrick, too felt that it was a crazy idea. Never one to trust the French, he said that they would be certain to let us down.[56]

Nutting also deleted the description of a rather sarcastic response to British policy, which originally came at the end of chapter 15. He claimed that, just as he was leaving the Foreign Office for the final time, Dodson showed him a recent telegram from Britain's Ambassador in Iraq, Sir Michael Wright:

> 'I thought you would like to see this before you go', he said, 'I think the last sentence will make you laugh.'
>
> He was right. At the end of a lengthy description of Nuri's troubles, Wright concluded by saying that he knew we did not admit collusion, but, all the same, could we not drop one small bomb on Israel too.[57]

It could well be argued, as Wilson himself had suggested, that Nutting's text would have been less damaging to Whitehall's reputation had these references to official disquiet about the Suez adventure been allowed to stand.

One official who almost certainly would have been embarrassed by being mentioned, however, was Sir Patrick Dean, the British signatory to the Sèvres protocol. The proofs refer to:

> the despatch to Paris of Sir Patrick Dean, the Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office in charge of liaison with the Chiefs of Staff, with further assurances for the French to pass on to the Israelis that we were determined to see the French plan carried out and would do all that the Israelis required in the way of air strikes against Egyptian airfields to forestall the bombing of their cities.[58]

In the published version, Dean is described merely as 'a senior Foreign Office official' and the reference to his liaison role has been removed. When, eleven years

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56 Proofs, pp. 79–80, TNA, FCO 12/29. Kirkpatrick's purported reaction is, on the face of it, surprising, given his reputation as one of the few supporters of the Suez operation among officials at the FO. Avon told Trend (Avon to Trend, 14 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/29) that Kirkpatrick had gone to the lengths of writing an anonymous article in *The Sunday Times* defending the government's actions. Evelyn Skuckburgh's diaries provide corroboration for this view. In an entry for 1 November 1956, he describes Kirkpatrick as the 'one exception' to the general picture of depression and astonishment within the FO; Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: Diaries 1951–56* (London, 1986), p. 363. Yet in a note prepared by Sir Patrick Dean in 1978, he confirms that Kirkpatrick was not enthusiastic about collusion with the French and Israelis (see undated note, Cabinet Office website, <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/foi/suez/suez_part13.pdf>).

57 Proofs, p. 127, TNA, FCO 12/29. In his discussion with Nutting on 20 April, Gore-Booth claimed that the passage was a breach of security. He added that 'A telegram existed which did not contain this "ben trovato" story about bombing Israel but to purport to produce it would be an infringement of the Official Secrets Act.' Nutting agreed to take it out, adding, however, that this was a shame 'since it was the only joke in the book'.

58 Proofs, p. 90, TNA, FCO 12/29.

later, Dean was mentioned by name in Selwyn Lloyd's account of Suez, he was clearly perturbed, and he consulted the Cabinet Office about how to respond.[59]

In one respect, Nutting pulled his punches even in the original proof version. One of the most famous passages in the published version of *No End of a Lesson* concerns Eden's furious phone call to Nutting at the Savoy Hotel shortly after the dismissal of General Glubb. Nutting claims that Eden said:

> But what's all this nonsense about isolating Nasser or 'neutralising' him as you call it? I want him destroyed can't you understand? I want him removed, and if the Foreign Office don't agree then you'd better come to Cabinet and explain why.[60]

Interviewed in 1984 for the *End of Empire* television series, Nutting claimed that Eden had actually used the word 'murdered' rather than 'destroyed'.[61] The term 'murdered' does not appear in the proof version. The only change from the proofs to the published version is that the word 'removed' was substituted for 'destroyed' in the third sentence of the paragraph.[62]

The Inner Circle

Wilson's decision not to act against Nutting's book was ultimately something of a formality. There was, however, a last-minute complication, when an item in *The Times* diary on 26 April raised fears that unexpurgated copies of his book might already have found their way into the hands of reviewers. Heath, perhaps acting at the behest of his former colleagues in the Eden government, immediately urged Trend to attempt to retrieve the review copies.[63] That evening, Wilson met with a group of senior ministers and officials to discuss the matter. They decided not only that legal action should not be taken against the book, but that no attempt should be made to recall review copies, since: 'Modern methods of photographic reproduction would nullify any attempts to suppress the contents of the uncorrected copies even if total recall of copies themselves proved possible. Moreover, recall would merely draw attention to the uncorrected copies and enhance both their value and interest in their contents.'[64] Wilson promised instead to concentrate on the rules governing future ministerial publications, a subject that was already being considered by a committee chaired by the Lord Chancellor. He announced his decision to the Cabinet the following day, taking care to warn off any of his own colleagues who might

59 Papers recently released on the Cabinet Office website, Note for the record by Hunt, 9 May 1978, <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/foi/suez/suez_part10.pdf>.

60 *NEL*, pp. 34–5.

61 Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (London, 1989), p. 316.

62 Proofs, pp. 18–19, TNA, FCO 12/29.

63 Minute by Gore-Booth, 26 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/30.

64 Note of a meeting held in 10 Downing Street at 6 p.m. on Wednesday 26 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/30.

be considering offering any similar revelations.[65] Serialization of the expurgated version of *No End of a Lesson* began as planned on 29 April.

The government's failure to suppress the book was, however, far from the end of the matter so far as Avon was concerned. Prior to publication, he obtained a copy of the revised version of the text from Selwyn Lloyd, and told Trend that it 'was worse than the first so far as he was concerned'.[66] He was keen to issue a statement about the book, and tried to gain access to a number of documents relating to the Suez affair in order to refresh his memory. Trend arranged for copies of an exchange of messages with Eisenhower and telegrams relating to Sir Alec Kirkbride's role in the Glubb saga to be sent to Avon's country residence, Alvediston Manor.[67] As for Avon's own response to Nutting's book, he had sent a draft of a statement to J.A. McCracken, his solicitor, on 24 April, asking him to check it for libel.[68] He had also asked McCracken to read the serialization in *The Times* from the point of view of defamation of character, but made it clear that he would not under any circumstances be prepared to take matters to court. His former Cabinet colleague, Lord Chandos, had urged this course of action, stressing in particular that Avon should on no account become involved in litigation.[69] McCracken advised Eden to keep the statement as short as possible, and suggested a number of cuts.[70] Over the following month, the statement underwent a series of almost obsessive revisions, with both short and long versions being circulated for comment. The group Eden consulted over the statement corresponded closely to the surviving members of his 'inner circle' during the Suez affair. Copies of an early version of the statement were circulated by Freddie Bishop, Eden's former Principal Private Secretary, to Selwyn Lloyd, Lennox-Boyd (by then Lord Boyd), Heath, Lord Normanbrook and Philip de Zulueta, Eden's former Foreign Affairs Private Secretary.[71]

The details of Avon's proposed statement changed over time. Three elements that remained constant, however, had their origins in the list of comments he had sent to Trend on 14 April. First, there was no attempt to challenge the accusations of collusion head on. Second, drafts of the statement implicitly or explicitly questioned the accuracy of much of Nutting's account, stressing that it was based purely on his own recollections, unsubstantiated by any documentary evidence.[72] A third and central element of the drafts of both the long and short versions – also present in Avon's original letter to Trend – was an attempt to undermine Nutting's protestations of innocence in the Suez affair. It focused on the speech which Nutting gave to the Conservative Party conference at Llandudno on 11 October 1956. This had originally

65 Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, vol. 2, p. 331.

66 Note by Reid, 28 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/30.

67 Reid to Wright, 29 April 1967, TNA, FCO 12/30.

68 Avon to McCracken, 24 April 1967, AP20/49, fol. 39.

69 Chandos to Normanbrook, 25 April 1967, AP20/49, fol. 23.

70 McCracken to Avon, 26 April 1967, AP20/49, fols 42, 42A.

71 Avon to Bishop, 28 April 1967, Boyd Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Eng. c. 3594, fol. 34.

72 See, for example, McCracken to Avon, 26 April 1967, AP 20/49, fols 42, 42A, and Avon to Boyd (enclosing revised 'Long version') 1 May 1967, Boyd Papers, Ms. Eng. c. 3594, fols 38–40.

been written for Lord Salisbury. Salisbury had, however, been prevented by illness from attending the conference, and the speech was delivered by Nutting in his place. It stressed Britain's willingness to act if the United Nations proved unable to 'do its duty'. In *No End of a Lesson*, Nutting claimed that he had revised the speech beforehand to render its tone less aggressive. Avon, however, stressed that Nutting had not displayed any reluctance to make the speech and had been keen to take credit for it. After consulting him, Avon added a reference to a conversation Lord Boyd claimed to have had with Nutting at the time of the conference, which gave no indication that Nutting was in anything but complete agreement with the terms of his speech.[73] The implication of this anecdote was clear: that Nutting was a hypocrite who had been happy to go along with the operation while it remained popular, but had turned his back on it when difficulties arose, in the process betraying his friends and colleagues. Rather than denying his own responsibility for the affair, Avon was keen to stress that Nutting was also heavily implicated. Crucially, however, as *No End of a Lesson* makes clear, Nutting delivered the Llandudno speech before learning of the Challe plan.

In the event, Avon failed to issue his statement directly, leaving Hennessy to conclude in his 1987 piece that 'from Eden there was not a word'.[74] Yet the remorseless process of drafting and redrafting the statement was not entirely wasted effort, for much of it seems to have been incorporated in what Eden's biographer describes as a 'memorably destructive' review of Nutting's book published in July by the Conservative MP Anthony Lambton.[75] Lambton was a former Parliamentary Private Secretary to Selwyn Lloyd. He had resigned from that post in 1957 after abstaining in a vote over the return of British ships to the Suez Canal, along with 13 other Tory MPs. Lambton included the anecdote about the Llandudno conference speech and quoted Boyd's conversation with Nutting. In effect, far from remaining silent, Avon allowed his statement to be made indirectly, via a third party.

'Loyalty to a Friend in Difficulties'

One question raised by this account is why Nutting was so resistant to pressure both from the government and from his former colleagues. A proper answer lies beyond the scope of this chapter. It seems likely, however, that the writing of *No End of a Lesson* coincided with the point at which Nutting finally abandoned hope of resuming a political career. He had been forced to resign the safe seat of Melton following his departure from the Foreign Office after finding himself in direct confrontation with his constituency association over Suez.[76] He blamed the breakdown of relations with his local association in part on his own reticence over the reasons for his resignation, a reticence aimed at avoiding damage to his government and country.

73 Boyd to Nutting, 20 June 1967, Boyd Papers, Ms. Eng. c. 3594, fol. 55.

74 Hennessy, 'No End of an Argument', p. 13.

75 Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden* (London, 1986), p. 615. Rhodes James confirms that Lambton was 'briefed by Avon'.

76 For a full account of this episode, see Leon D. Epstein, *British Politics and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1964), pp. 104–7.

Towards the end of *No End of a Lesson*, he described how Macmillan dissuaded him from making a statement in the House on his resignation, on the grounds that it 'could easily bring down the Government'. Macmillan predicted that if he acted with discretion, Nutting would 'lead the Party one day'. 'At that moment,' Nutting claims, 'I wanted to be quit of politics and all the hypocrisy that seemed to go with it.'[77] Yet Nutting did not abandon hope of returning to the Commons. According to D.R. Thorpe, an opportunity to do so arose as late as 1965, when R.A. Butler stepped down as MP for Saffron Walden. Thorpe claims that Butler was keen for Nutting to succeed him.[78] In the event, however, although Nutting was interviewed for the seat, he performed badly and was not appointed as Conservative candidate. Peter Kirk was selected to fight the seat on 1 March 1965.[79]

There is a further personal subtext, which may have been in the minds of his former colleagues when they considered the impending publication of *No End of a Lesson*. On 31 October 1955, Nutting, 'looking very haggard and unhappy', had told Evelyn Shuckburgh that he and his wife were separating.[80] This private matter threatened to become public the following month, when Nutting visited New York to represent Britain in disarmament talks at the United Nations. Rumours began to circulate in the city that Nutting was conducting an affair with a married American woman, and that there was a possibility that her husband, Alfred Vanderbild, might issue a writ for divorce. Eden contemplated recalling his Foreign Minister, but was afraid that this would simply lend credence to the rumours.[81] Nutting was probably lucky to retain his job in the reshuffle at the end of December, something Eden's biographer, Robert Rhodes James, attributes to the Prime Minister's 'loyalty to a friend in difficulties', a loyalty which, he suggests, was to prove 'singularly misplaced and ill rewarded'.[82] News of Nutting's separation from his wife surfaced in the *Daily Express* in June 1956, and his attempts to hold on to his Melton constituency following his resignation from the government were hampered by the *Express* group's continued hounding of him over his affair with Mrs Vanderbild.[83] Journalists may well have received some encouragement from within the Conservative administration. On 3 November 1956, the day Nutting was to announce his resignation, Eden's Press Adviser, William Clark, recorded in his diary that he was 'really shocked when de Zulueta rang me to say that the Chief Whip's office was asking if I couldn't hint to the press that Nutting was terribly under the influence of his American mistress and anyway was not quite himself nowadays'.[84] Rhodes James chooses instead to stress the extent to which Eden stood by Nutting. He strongly implies that the 'sadness and mystification' Eden felt at the publication of *No End of a Lesson* owed much to a sense that his former colleague owed him a particular debt of gratitude. Rhodes James also adds pointedly

77 *NEL*, p. 162.

78 D.R. Thorpe, *Eden: The Life and Times of Anthony Eden, First Earl of Avon, 1897–1977* (London, 2003), p. 534.

79 *The Times*, 2 March 1965.

80 Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 295.

81 Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden*, p. 424.

82 Ibid.

83 Epstein, *British Politics and the Suez Crisis*, p. 106.

84 William Clark, *From Three Worlds* (London, 1986), p. 207.

that Avon possessed documents 'which, if revealed, would have done [Nutting] great harm'.[85] Here was another invisible bond of honour and obligation, which Eden and his inner circle may have hoped would ensure Nutting's silence.

Conclusion

The story of the largely unsuccessful attempt to suppress Nutting's book provides support for David Vincent's thesis that secrecy in modern Britain has been maintained less by legislation than by personal inhibitions inculcated from childhood in the British elite.[86] As is demonstrated above, this 'culture of secrecy' could draw support from notions of loyalty, solidarity and shared identity based on nation, party, education and even family. Informal networks linking those privy to official secrets – in this case, the small cabal of Suez 'insiders' centred upon Eden – were expected to police their own members and maintain an 'authorized' version of history.[87] Although this kind of pressure ultimately failed to persuade Nutting either to abandon the book or to remove most of its key allegations, there was a general expectation within government that it *would* succeed; and in defying it, Nutting found himself shunned not merely by Eden's circle, but by those at Westminster who shared Nutting's criticisms of Suez. Even Richard Crossman, whose own published diaries were later to be denounced as a gross violation of Cabinet confidentiality, who expressed admiration for Hugh Thomas's book on Suez, and who felt that Nutting's allegations were 'something which everyone who cares about Parliament has got to take seriously', described *No End of A Lesson* as 'an odious little book'. He regarded it as motivated by revenge, and expressed sympathy for Selwyn Lloyd, whom he thought looked 'pretty broken now'.[88] A number of former ministers, including Kilmuir and R.A. Butler, had helped Hugh Thomas with his book. But Whitehall – and indeed, the British culture of secrecy – had always made a distinction between discreet, unattributable briefings and an outright, public defiance of the 'gentlemanly' code.

Yet if the attempt to suppress Nutting's book conformed in some respects to a broader pattern of official secrecy cases, it also pointed to the special status of the Suez campaign. Trend's approach to Eden's 'inner circle', over a year before Labour ministers were informed of Nutting's intentions, was partly an attempt to ensure that the book was quietly and discreetly smothered at birth without Labour ministers having to be involved. It was also, however, an acknowledgement that the conspiracy Nutting was threatening to reveal was the *personal* responsibility of a small number of individuals, and that those individuals had a moral duty to assist the current administration in seeking to suppress information about it. In effect, from

85 Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden*, p. 615. Correspondence relating to the collapse of Nutting's marriage can be found among the Avon Papers at the University of Birmingham.

86 See David Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain 1832–1998* (Oxford, 1998).

87 In another context, the work of Dr Christopher Murphy has illustrated the role of the informal network of former members of the wartime Special Operations Executive in shaping the history of that organisation. See C.J. Murphy, 'The Origins of SOE in France', *Historical Journal*, 46/4 (2003): 1–18.

88 Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, vol. 2, pp. 330, 338.

the point of view of the permanent civil service, Suez more closely resembled a private rather than an 'official' secret.

If this raises important questions about the nature of power in the British state, so too does Trend's role in co-ordinating the response to Nutting's book. Crossman reflected upon this in his diary, following a ministerial meeting at which Trend had:

> made it perfectly clear that he and he alone had taken the decision about Nutting's book because the Prime Minister, like any other Labour Minister, must be denied access to the minutes of the other side and doesn't therefore know whether Nutting's account of the Suez Cabinets is correct or not.

Crossman added: 'So the Secretary of the Cabinet becomes the independent arbiter in such affairs and in this respect he's played a role as important as that of the monarch a hundred years ago.'[89] Strictly speaking, as we have seen, Crossman was wrong. Trend was scrupulously correct in giving ministers the final say on whether any action should be taken against Nutting. Yet it was the Cabinet Secretary who dictated on what information ministers could base that decision. In broader terms, then, Crossman was surely right to be concerned about the implications for British democracy of senior civil servants' unique access to Whitehall's collective memory and to its darker secrets.

89 Ibid., pp. 343–4.

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Chapter 14

Post-Suez Consequences: Anglo-American Relations in the Middle East from Eisenhower to Nixon

Tore T. Petersen

For the United States, Suez was a demonstration of overwhelming American power, humiliating the French and the British and pushing the Israelis out of the Sinai Peninsula. In addition, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles considered the outcome of the crisis as proof, if proof was needed, of American moral superiority. Basking in the afterglow of the seemingly successful American Suez policy, Dulles testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 18 March 1957:

> I believe that the United States is freer than almost any great nation has ever been from the temptation to abuse its power for selfish purposes. We are more free than any other nation in the world except some of the very smallest nations, of any desire to have our foreign policies serve in any concrete, tangible way our self-interest in the way of aggrandisement, expansion of territory, commercial advantage, and the like.[1]

The price of success at Suez was rapidly increasing anti-Americanism in England and France, which, the Americans feared, if unchecked, might lead to a rupture of the Atlantic alliance.[2] Within the Eisenhower administration, there was therefore a growing realization that the US would have difficulties in going it alone, that the United States needed allies. This brings us to the second Dulles quote, this time from a briefing paper to President Eisenhower for the upcoming Bermuda conference with the new British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, again in March 1957:

> The US needs the alliance for much the same reasons as does Britain. We rely on British help, both material and psychological, to implement our policies towards the Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, South Asia and some areas of the Far East. We recognize

1 John Foster Dulles, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 18 March 1957, United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series), vol. IX, (Washington, DC, 1957), pp. 420–21.

2 Douglas Dillon, American Ambassador Paris to Dulles, 29 November 1956, Ann Whitman File (AWF), International Series, Mollet, Guy (1), DDEL; Winthrop Aldrich, American Ambassador London, to State Department, 26 November 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*)*, 1955–57, Volume XVI: Suez Crisis July 26–December 31, 1956* (Washington, DC, 1990), p. 1197.

> that the two acting in concert, with the aid of the Commonwealth, form a more persuasive combination than the US acting alone.[3]

Incidentally, both quotes have interesting resonances with present American foreign policy.

What Were the Longer-term Consequences of the Suez Crisis?

Firstly, as the current occupant in the White House has learned to his cost, there are the difficulties of going it alone, and as demonstrated by the Dulles quote above, the US needs allies. George W. Bush's doctrine of pre-emptive war and unilateral foreign policy has left the US with few allies, and has caused endless grief and many problems for the Americans.[4] The great irony of Suez for the Americans, then, was after a clear demonstration of US power, the success left the US in the longer term with less influence in the Middle East after Suez, compared to American influence prior to the crisis. George Humphrey, Eisenhower's Secretary of the Treasury, smugly noted to American Congressmen in the aftermath of the Suez crisis that the 'Brit[ish] government certainly realizes now [that] Britain is no longer a world power able to act without American banking. They will never embark on another escapade like this.'[5] But the reality was different from that which American foreign policymakers confidently expected. The US simply could not perform another Suez if it wanted to keep its friends. After the American invasion of Lebanon in 1958, there were few if any penalties applied for crossing the US in the Middle East. In fact, the US refrained from military intervention in the region from 1958 to 1991, a point not lost on America's allies or Arab radicals. For the Anglo-American Middle East – that is, British and American areas of common interest in the region – this would have important consequences.[6] In the period under consideration, 1957 to 1972, American initiatives in the Middle East independent of Britain were few and far between.

Secondly, Suez became a useful bludgeon to beat the Americans with in times of Anglo-American disagreement. After administrating defeat to the British during the Suez crisis, the Americans became extremely solicitous of its main ally, as John Darwin notes: 'successive American administrations showed a surprising tenderness towards British pretensions to remain an independent great power'.[7] Macmillan repeatedly dragged up Suez to move American policy in times of Anglo-American

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3 Dulles, 'Summary Briefing Paper', before Bermuda conference, March 1957, n.d., General Background, Eisenhower Diary, AWF, DDEL.

4 Lloyd E. Ambrosius, 'Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush: Historical Comparisons of Ends and Means in Their Foreign Policies', *Diplomatic History*, 30/3 (2006): 509–19.

5 George Humphrey comment, 'Notes on a Legislative Leadership Meeting', 31 December, AWF, Legislative meetings series (5), Minnich notes, White House, Office of the Special Secretary, DDEL.

6 Tore T. Petersen, *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East, 1961–1969: A Willing Retreat* (Brighton and Portland, OR, 2006), p. 3. The term is flexible, changing continuously with differing patterns of Anglo-American interactions in the Middle East.

7 John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 60–61.

discord. When informed by Eisenhower that the Americans were going to invade Lebanon in July 1958, Macmillan told the President: 'You are doing a Suez on me', browbeating the Eisenhower administration to accept a parallel sending of British troops to Jordan.[8] And so it went, all the way until, and perhaps beyond, the Nixon administration. Briefing President Nixon before his first European trip in February–March 1969, the US State Department tried to put some sobriety in the American assessment of Britain: 'The decline of the British role in the world is reflected in the fact that we want little from them, other than support in the Middle East and Vietnam, and their cooperation in dealing with the Soviets.'[9] But this is not the way National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger saw it, lamenting in his memoirs: 'of all British political leaders, [Prime Minister Edward] Heath was the most indifferent to the American connection and perhaps even to Americans individually'. Heath, Chief Whip for the Conservative Party during the Suez crisis, recalled Suez from time to time, claiming that many problems between the US and Europe had their roots in the crisis, again quoting Kissinger: 'which stimulated a long-festering resentment and fostered a sense of impotence that accelerated their withdrawal from overseas commitments and added to American burdens'.[10]

Thirdly, the Suez crisis did not, as Peter Hahn and others have claimed, destroy 'all vestiges of Britain's influence in the Middle East'.[11] The claim is exaggerated, as shown by John Nigel Ashton and other scholars who argue that Britain still retained considerable influence in the Middle East after Suez.[12] As Simon Smith explains:

> Although Suez cannot be viewed as anything other than a reverse for Britain, it neither extinguished British influence in the Middle East, nor led to a transfer of power in all instances to America. This was especially so in the Persian Gulf where Britain, while seeking American support, resolutely defended its traditional role.[13]

This brings us to our fourth and last point. There is more to the story: while Suez may be seen as an American attempt at slapping down Britain for acting independently of the US, for Britain the crisis turned out almost to be a blessing in disguise. This chapter argues that in reality, the Suez crisis freed Britain from the American embrace in the Middle East, and possibly also elsewhere; thereafter, Britain could, with little fear of American sanctions or pressure, act unilaterally in the region. And successive British governments did precisely that, expanding or retreating from their areas of

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8 Alistair Horne, *Macmillan, 1957–1986* (London, 1989), p. 93.

9 President Nixon's Trip to Europe, February–March 1969, n.d., briefing United Kingdom, President's Trip Files, Richard Nixon National Security Council files, Nixon Presidential materials staff, NARA.

10 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London, 1982), pp. 141, 708.

11 Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945–1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (London, 1991), p. 240.

12 Nigel John Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955–59* (London, 1996); Jeffrey Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal from East of Suez: The Politics of Retrenchment* (London, 1998).

13 Simon C. Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States, 1950–71* (London, 2004), p. 114.

interest as they saw fit, with little regard for American policy and without having to fear any sanctions such as the Eisenhower administration imposed during the Suez crisis. This was almost immediately demonstrated by Macmillan, who after patching up relations with the Americans in Bermuda in March 1957, dispatched troops to suppress a Saudi-inspired rebellion in Oman in July 1957 despite strong American urgings not to provoke King Saud, whom Eisenhower sought to build up as an alternative to Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser.[14] So much for Humphrey's claim above.

The Conservative Resurgence in the Middle East, 1957–64

The remainder of the Conservative era under Macmillan, and later Sir Alec Douglas-Home, was anything but a retreat, but rather an effort to consolidate and even expand British influence in the Middle East through repeated military operations. There was little need to worry about the American position or opposition, the US was informed but rarely consulted on impending British military actions, and seemed content to be cheerleading from the sidelines. Ironically, it was as if Suez had never happened. The main American concern during this period in the Middle East was keeping the British in, the Russians out, and the Arab nationalists quiet.[15]

As a result of the Yemen civil war that began in October 1962, and the subsequent intervention of Nasser's Egypt, threatening to undermine the Saudi monarchy and the British Aden colony, Saudi Arabia and Britain overcame years of estrangement and resumed diplomatic relations on 17 January 1963. Thereafter, the British pursued an aggressive commercial policy towards Saudi Arabia, including pushing and selling large quantities of military hardware. King Faisal feared a Saudi army filled with officers with Nasserite sympathies, and sought British assistance to create and train a 'White Army' – that is a National Guard loyal to the regime. Faisal intended to use the White Army to prevent and crush any uprising from the regular forces. Britain, with Macmillan's approval, encouraged British officers to serve as instructors in the White Army. Britain's resumption of relations with Saudi Arabia represented a dramatic resurgence of British influence in the Middle East since its nadir after the Suez crisis. Slowly, the British had built themselves up to real power and influence, by military intervention in Oman 1957 to 1959, landing forces in Jordan in 1958 and Kuwait in 1961, and finally, conducting small-scale operations against Yemeni incursions, mostly in the late 1950s, but also in the early 1960s. The British military presence was substantial, so much so that the US Joint Chiefs of Staff noted in a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara: 'The UK forces in the Middle East can conduct effective military operations anywhere in the Arabian

14 Michael Dockrill, 'Restoring the "Special Relationship": The Bermuda and Washington Conferences, 1957', in Dick Richardson and Glyn Stone (eds), *Decisions and Diplomacy: Essays in Twentieth-century History* (London, 1995), pp. 205–23; Dulles to American Embassy London, 25 July 1957, *FRUS, 1955–57, Volume XIII: Near East: Jordan–Yemen* (Washington, DC, 1988), pp. 231–2.

15 Tore T. Petersen, 'Crossing the Rubicon? Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East, 1964–1968: A Bibliographical Review', *The International Review* 22/2 (2000): 318–40.

Peninsula. The combination of coordinated US and UK military capability represents a responsive and flexible force for establishing a credible deterrent.'[16] The Douglas-Home government even tried to compete on American turf by trying to muscle in on the lucrative Saudi Arabian arms market at the expense of American companies.[17] In addition, the US was reluctantly forced to acquiesce to accepting continuing British military operations in the Aden Federation as well as a bombing raid on the Yemen Arab Republic's frontier fort at Harib during the spring of 1964.[18]

The post-Suez Conservative legacy in the Middle East was a great increase in British power and influence, a legacy that the Labour Party, after winning the election in October 1964, would prove to care little or nothing for. Labour would, despite rhetoric to contrary, busy itself dismantling the empire. But while pursuing different policies, both Labour and the Tories were free to do so without fear of American reactions or pressure.

The Labour Government 1964–70 and the United States

When the Labour government of Harold Wilson announced the withdrawal of British forces from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971, President Johnson protested against the decision on 11 January 1968: 'Our own capability and political will could be gravely weakened if we have to man all the ramparts alone.'[19] As the Vietnam War deepened, Lyndon Johnson and his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, were unwilling for the US to serve as a world policeman, and saw great value in a responsible ally projecting military force into areas where the US government had limited military capability. Britain possessed a string of bases extending from the Middle East to the Indian Ocean and the Far East, supplementing and complementing American bases and ability for force projection. This complex of bases, labelled Britain's role east of Suez in the 1960s, made Britain a global military power.[20]

The Johnson administration placed great store in a continued worldwide role for Britain. American concerns about British policy were threefold: prevent devaluation

16 Memorandum of conversation: Macmillan, Home et al., 10 January 1963, TNA, PREM 11/4446; for documentation of the White Army, see TNA, FO 371/168871–4; for arms supplies to Saudi Arabia, see TNA, FO 371/168885–9; for an American view of British arms sales to Saudi Arabia, see American Embassy, London, to Secretary of State, 21 May 1963, and 16 December 1963: 'British Aircraft Corporation representatives are currently in Saudi Arabia attempting to sell Thunderbird surface to air missiles, radar warning systems, anti-tank missiles and supersonic fighters'; both NARA, RG 59, DEF 12-5-Saud; Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, 6 March 1963, *FRUS, 1961–63*, vol. XVIII, pp. 394–6.

17 'Supplement of Record of Meeting March 6 to Discuss Lightnings for Saudi Arabia', 6 March 1964, TNA, FO 371/174683/Bs 1192/14G.

18 Julian Paget, *Last Post: Aden 1964–1967* (London, 1969), p. 49; Sam Belk to McGeorge Bundy, '"Postmortem" on the Yemen and the Role of the U.S. in the Security Council', 29 May 1964, Country File, National Security File (CFNSF), LBJL.

19 Johnson to Wilson, 11 January 1968, National Security File, Special Head of State Correspondence, United Kingdom (2 of 4), LBJL.

20 Michael Middeke, 'Britain's Global Military Role, Conventional Defence and Anglo-American Interdependence after Nassau', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 24/1 (2001): 143–64.

of the pound sterling, avoid reductions in the British Army on the Rhine (BOAR), and for the British to remain east of Suez. American policymakers considered the pound the first line of defence for the dollar. If the British devalued, international speculators might turn their attention to the dollar, forcing a devaluation of the American currency. Maintaining the value of sterling created numerous difficulties for Britain: it required high interest rates, which had a deflationary effect on the domestic economy, and economic and military aid to keep new states like Malaysia within the sterling area. All these factors contributed to straining scarce British reserves of gold and dollars.[21] Equally unacceptable to the Americans was any reduction in the BOAR or withdrawal from east of Suez to restore the British balance of payments and prevent devaluation. When Wilson announced the termination of the British position in the Persian Gulf, the Johnson administration's attempt to manipulate British policies by economic subsidies foundered on Labour's ideological juggernaut in dismantling the empire. In the end, American policy towards Britain ended in dismal failure: the pound was devalued, the British Army on the Rhine reduced, and the commitment east of Suez terminated. There are strong indications that Wilson and the Labour Party were intent all along on ending Britain's overseas commitments for reasons of ideology, the poor shape of the British economy being just an added inducement to speed up the withdrawal process.[22] While the Wilson government was determined to end the British role east of Suez, it was flexible in the ways and means by which the decision was implemented. In the meantime, east of Suez and the ever-wobbling pound were useful tools in pressuring the Americans for money and other concessions. In fairness to the US's failure to detect the Labour government's determination to end British overseas commitments, leading Labour politicians hid their intentions by rhetoric committed to empire. It is perhaps in this context that Wilson's rather extravagant claim, 'our frontiers are in the Himalayas', must be seen.[23]

Given the American interest in a continued British presence east of Suez, why did the Johnson administration acquiesce in the precipitate British withdrawal from the Middle East? British Secretary of State for Defence Denis Healey did not think the Americans wanted the British to stay for reasons of grand strategy:

> The United States, after trying for thirty years to get Britain out of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, was now trying desperately to keep us in; during the Vietnam war it did not want to be the only country killing coloured people on their own soil.[24]

Apart from Healey's allegations, a continued British presence east of Suez grew in importance with the intensification of the Vietnam War. As Saki Dockrill observes: 'Paradoxically, however, the deeper American commitment in Vietnam enhanced the importance to the US of Britain's military presence both East of Suez and in Europe.' For British politicians, the Vietnam War had almost the opposite effect,

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21 David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century* (London, 1991), pp. 208–9.

22 Petersen, *Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East*, pp. 69–77, 114–15.

23 Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 228.

24 Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London, 1989), pp. 280–81.

lessening American power and authority in their eyes.[25] Labour's policies may also be seen as a not so subtle attempt to liberate Britain from the special relationship. Foreign Secretary George Brown argued to his fellow ministers in July 1966 that Britain should break with the US, devalue the pound, withdraw its forces from east of Suez and join the Common Market.[26]

While paying lip service to close Anglo-American relations and a continued British role east of Suez, Labour, in the end, did not care much for either. Labour politicians themselves have produced overwhelming and almost uniform arguments in favour of withdrawing from the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. One-time Naval Secretary Christopher Mayhew argued in a book published in 1967 that the British bases did not protect the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, the oil supply was protected by the need for the producer countries to market their oil. Besides, the east of Suez role and dependence on the US probably prevented British entry into the Common Market, because of too close an association with the Americans and preoccupation with Britain's overseas role at the expense of Europe.[27] For Defence Secretary Denis Healey, British military bases outside Europe were an 'anachronism'.[28] Regrets for the withdrawal were, in the eyes of former Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, 'nostalgia for the nineteenth century'.[29] For George Brown, withdrawal from east of Suez was 'inevitable and essential'.[30] Roy Jenkins, Chancellor of the Exchequer from November 1967, pushed for an early withdrawal.[31] Wilson felt that clinging to the east of Suez role was one of his worst mistakes as Prime Minister.[32]

The Heath Government and the Nixon Administration, 1970–72

When the British Labour Party announced withdrawal of British forces from the Persian Gulf in January 1968, the US faced a potential power vacuum in the area. The incoming Nixon administration, however, preoccupied with the Soviet Union and China and the war in Vietnam, had no intention of replacing the British in the Gulf. Nixon and Kissinger realized that it was not possible to reverse British withdrawal, and urged Britain to retain as much as possible of its former position in the region. To avoid further military commitments, the US encouraged Iran and Saudi Arabia to maintain area security. Missed by most scholars, Nixon and Kissinger engineered the rise in oil prices between 1969 and 1972 to enable Saudi Arabia and Iran to

25 Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice between Europe and the World?* (New York, 2002), pp. 114, 116.

26 Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London, 1992), p. 433.

27 Christopher Mayhew, *Britain's Role Tomorrow* (London, 1967), pp. 54, 113.

28 Healey, *The Time of My Life*, p. 277.

29 Michael Stewart, *Life and Labour: An Autobiography* (London, 1980), p. 233.

30 George Brown, *In My Way: The Political Memoirs of Lord George-Brown* (London, 1971), p. 141.

31 Roy Jenkins, *A Life at the Centre* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 225.

32 Philip Ziegler, *Wilson: The Authorized Life of Lord Wilson of Rievaulx* (London, 1993), p. 211.

purchase the necessary military hardware to serve as guardians of the Gulf.[33] Rather than fighting the demand for raising oil prices, the US seemed to be staying its hand over the Arab producers, even radical anti-American regimes. James Akins, the State Department's (and later Nixon's) chief oil expert, practically begged the oil producers to increase prices in an essay in *Foreign Affairs*. In addition, Akins totally rejected force as an alternative to keep the producers in check. Libya was the first Middle Eastern oil producer to assault the Anglo-American government/company front successfully, accompanied by a barrage of anti-Western propaganda and activities. Still Akins ruled out the use of force: 'As for the possibility of using force (actually suggested since by a handful of imperialists *manqués*), suffice it that it was never for a moment considered.' Given Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi's future antics and anti-Western actions, Akin's conclusion on Libyan oil policy is highly revealing: 'The Libyans were competent men in a strong position; they played their hand straight, and found it a winning one.'[34]

Interestingly, the move to increase oil prices was one of the few American initiatives in the Middle East independent of Britain during this period. The British initially resisted this challenge to what Nathan Citino has termed the 'postwar petroleum order' – the close co-operation between the major oil-producing companies and Western powers securing plentiful oil at reasonable prices.[35] But Britain soon realized the new policy of increasing oil prices could be turned to its benefit. Frank Brenchley, one-time head of the Arabian Department of the Foreign Office, notes that much of the oil price increase went to purchase arms from Britain and the US, whilst Saudi Arabia supported the British counterinsurgency in Oman financially and Iran provided some 10,000 troops: 'The increased oil payments were thus yielding some useful political dividends.'[36]

Ironically, with its announcement of leaving the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971, Labour had manoeuvred itself into a position of heavy responsibility combined

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33 Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Power and Money* (New York, 1992), pp. 581–6; J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London, 1980), pp. 346–50; Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (London, 2002), pp. 65–9. For an alternative view, see: Richard C. Thornton, *The Nixon–Kissinger Years: The Reshaping of American Policy* (St Paul, MN, 2001), pp. 69–88.

34 James E. Akins, 'The Oil Crisis: This Time the Wolf is Here', *Foreign Affairs*, 51/3 (April, 1973): 462–90; Jack Anderson, *Fiasco* (New York, 1983).

35 Nathan Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to Opec: Eisenhower, King Saud, and the Making of U.S.–Saudi Relations* (Bloomington, IN, 2002). See, for instance, the reaction of Sir Eric Drake, Chairman of the British Petroleum Company, when meeting State Department officials: 'Drake said with ill-concealed hostility that it was really the fault of the US government that oil companies had felt forced to give in to Libyans. He said Europeans would have gone along with hard line by the oil companies with Libya, even at the cost of a shutdown in Libyan production and draw down of European stocks to low levels, if only the US government had been willing to explain to the Europeans that all this was really in their best interests'; Memorandum of conversation: Drake and State Department officials, 13 October 1970, 1970, NARA, RG 59, PET (petroleum) 6 Libya, State Department Central File.

36 Frank Brenchley, *Britain and the Middle East: An Economic History 1945–87* (London, 1989), p. 205.

with steadily decreasing influence. Problems in the Gulf abounded, requiring continued British attention and work if they were to leave the area in good order and avoid another Aden-style situation, where their November 1967 departure was accompanied by chaos and terrorism. There were numerous border claims to sort out, as well as opportunistic new ones emerging in the wake of British withdrawal. Iran claimed Bahrain by virtue of temporary occupation in the eighteenth century, and the Abu Musa Island from the Sheikhdom of Sharjah and the Tunbs Islands from the Sheikhdom of Ras al Khaimah. The Foreign Office feared this dispute between Iranians and Arabs could result in military confrontation, complicating British efforts to leave on schedule. If the Shah occupied the islands, Britain might have to use force in accordance with its treaty obligations. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia renewed his dormant claim to the Buraimi oasis in the British protected territories of Abu Dhabi and Muscat and Oman, but the Foreign Office discounted the King using military force to press his case.

While facing challenges to its declining imperial authority, Britain at the same time needed the assistance of the Shah and the King to press Qatar, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, 'Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah to federate into the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Then, all good things could happen; Britain would help create a union force incorporating the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS). The TOS were a mercenary force commanded by British officers, controlled by the British government, not owing allegiance to any ruler. By local standards, it was well trained, experienced and effective. Progress towards the UAE was painfully slow, both because of internal squabbles among the potential members of the union and Iranian, and Saudi territorial claims. With the British announcement to leave, the rebellion in Dhofar, Oman deepened. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office believed the substantial British investment in the Sultan's armed forces could contain the uprising, making it possible to withdraw British forces according to the established timetable.[37]

For all their bluster about reversing Labour's withdrawal decision of January 1968, after their surprise victory in the election of June 1970, the Conservatives adhered to Labour's policy. But in contrast to Labour's wish to cut the umbilical cord of empire, the Tories wanted to retain as much influence as possible in the Persian Gulf. During the Anglo-American talks on the Gulf on 26 June 1972, the Foreign Office explained the new British role in the area:

> Britain intended to play as active and prominent a role in Gulf affairs as was possible in existing political circumstances. The modernisation of British relations with the Gulf States had proceeded smoothly, and instead of the low profile usually adopted by Britain in such post-independence or post-colonial situations, British influence remained strong and visible throughout the area.[38]

37 Foreign and Commonwealth Office memorandum, 'Political and Security Factors Affecting the Process of British Military Withdrawal from the Persian Gulf', 7 October 1969, TNA, FCO 8/985/NB 10/27.

38 Comment by A.D. Parsons, FCO, 26 June 1972, TNA, FCO 8/1806/NB 3/30401.

Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home began a series of consultations with the Gulf rulers to ascertain whether Labour's policies could be reversed. The major powers of the Gulf – Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait – opposed continued British presence after 1971, while the lesser sheikhdoms wanted Britain to remain, although only Dubai was prepared to say so publicly. Remaining under such circumstances would have opened Britain to charges of imperialism and provided grist to the propaganda mills of Iraq and the revolutionary movements on the Arabian Peninsula, making a continued presence exceedingly difficult.[39]

The new Prime Minister, Edward Heath, explained to the Cabinet on 23 July 1970 that Britain's objective in the Gulf was: 'to secure a progressive reduction in expenditure while encouraging and assisting the local Rulers to shoulder their own responsibilities within the framework of an effective federal organization'.[40] The Shah was persuaded to drop his claim to Bahrain, in return for Britain's tacit acceptance of Iran occupying the Persian Gulf islands to which he had laid claim. The United Arab Emirates was proclaimed on 2 December 1971, but was the most fragile of creations patched together rather hurriedly by the departing British. Bahrain and Qatar opted out of the new federation. Sharjah's ruler was murdered two months after the inauguration of the UAE in an attempted coup, while Sharjah and Fujairah fought a small war over local territorial issues in 1972.[41] Still, even after 1971 vestiges of the British position remained strong in the Persian Gulf. According to James H. Noyes, United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Britain still had important political, commercial and military ties to the area. The military ties, in addition to air facilities on the Masirah island off the coast of Oman, included regular air and naval visits, joint exercises with the local states and military forces assigned to Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi and Qatar. The Americans were well pleased with the residual British influence in the Gulf: 'So while small in number and without direct operational functions as British military per se', Noyes observed, 'their importance is considerable.'[42] Britain's treaty of friendship with the UAE provided for the provision of British military advisory teams.[43] In fact, as one authority notes, the British withdrawal from the UAE was more apparent than real. British nationals still dominated the commercial and banking life of the

39 David Holden, 'The Persian Gulf: After the British Raj', *Foreign Affairs*, 49/4 (July, 1971): 721–35.

40 Heath to Cabinet, 23 July 1970, TNA, CAB 128/47 pt I, CM (70) 8th Conclusions; F. Gregory Gause, 'British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968–1973', *Review of International Studies*, 11/4 (1985): 247–73.

41 G.G. Arthur, 'Persian Gulf: Annual Review for 1970', TNA, FCO 8/1570/NB1/2; Foreign Minister Douglas-Home to Prime Minister Edward Heath, 12 November 1970, TNA, PREM 15/538; Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (London, 1991), p. 137.

42 Noyes, testimony, 2 February 1972, 'U.S. Interests in and Policy toward the Persian Gulf", Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Near East of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 92 Cong. 2nd Sess. (Washington, DC, 1972), p. 6.

43 R.M. Burrell and Alvin J. Cotrell, 'Iran, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean', *National Strategy Information Center* (New York, 1972), p. 21.

sheikhdoms, whilst British officers ran its military forces.[44] The whole point of Tory policy, Home explained to his American counterpart, was to establish an indirect British presence 'so that we could exercise the maximum political influence with the minimum British presence'.[45]

The US had little influence on British policy, being mostly reduced to a supporting role.[46] There are few, if any, indications of the US pursuing an independent policy in the British areas of interest. When Douglas-Home described British goals in the Gulf (see above) to US Secretary of State, William Rogers, on 11 July 1970, Rogers expressed total agreement with British policy.[47] Later, in a meeting with the British envoy to the Persian Gulf, William Luce, Rogers went out of his way to be helpful to the British, concluding the conversation by asking 'if the US Government could be of any assistance'.[48] Sometimes the British did not even bother to inform the Americans. Because of the Sultan of Oman's lacklustre response, in the eyes of the British, in suppressing the growing Marxist rebellion in the Dhofar province, the Tories assisted his son Qabus in ousting his father on 24 July 1970, thereafter conducting a sustained anti-guerrilla campaign culminating in victory in 1975. Reporting the coup in Oman to Rogers on 26 July 1970, Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco lamented: 'The United Kingdom apparently knew of Qabus' plans in advance but disclaims any responsibility. We learned of the coup through wire service reports on July 26.'[49] Sisco's comment, of course, confirms a pattern of British independence and unilateralism *vis-à-vis* the US in the period under review here.

The long-term consequences of Suez for Britain, then, were to enable it to pursue independent policies of the United States in the Middle East and sometimes elsewhere, as well as to retain much of its former influence in the Persian Gulf. But by giving up its fixed positions and trying to maintain its empire on the cheap, Britain turned into an arms salesman supreme. Unfortunately, offering and selling huge quantities of arms do not a foreign policy make, leaving Britain in the long run with less influence in regional affairs. The US sold Iran and Saudi Arabia huge amounts of military hardware to enable them to maintain security in the Persian Gulf after the British withdrawal. The price of being unwilling and unable to devise policies independent of Britain was soon evident. To an even greater extent than Britain, for the US arms sales were to prove no realistic alternative for foreign policy. The US hid under the Iranian security blanket for almost a decade. Given the weakness of the regime and the Shah's nonsensical dreams of turning Iran into one of the top five industrial

44 John Duke Anthony, *Arab States of the Lower Gulf: People, Politics, Petroleum* (Washington, DC, 1975), p. 228.

45 Memorandum of conversation: William Rogers and Home, 11 July 1970, TNA, FCO 7/1828/ALUSJ/548/12.

46 Sisco to Rogers, 13 January 1971, 1971, NARA, RG 59, POL 7 UK.

47 Memorandum of conversation: Home and Rogers, 11 July 1970, TNA, FCO 7/1828/ALUS 3/548/12.

48 Memorandum of conversation: Luce and Rogers, 13 January 1971, POL 33 Persian Gulf.

49 Sisco to Rogers, 29 July 1970, 1970, NARA, RG 59, POL 15-Oman.

and military powers in the world, the policy was cavalierly irresponsible.[50] Similarly, leaving Saudi Arabia wallowing in oil money and medieval stupor, a seedbed for Islamic fundamentalists, has created huge future problems for the US.[51] Indeed, it is difficult to point a single occasion on which Saudi Arabia has served as an American strategic asset in the Middle East.

50 James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American–Iranian Relations* (London, 1988).

51 Gilles Keppel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, 2002).

Chapter 15

Suez 1956 and the Moral Disarmament of the British Empire

A.J. Stockwell[1]

It is readily claimed that the Suez crisis marked the end of the British Empire. We have been told how it exposed Britain's weakness in the world, ended its freedom of action in international affairs and unleashed such moral outrage that, in its aftermath, the British government had no option but to withdraw from historic imperial commitments. Yet an anti-imperial consensus did not emerge in Britain; on the contrary, Eden's conduct divided the nation and provoked imperial fervour in some quarters. Indeed, despite the damage inflicted by the crisis on Britain's standing in the world, empire and attempts to justify empire proved remarkably resilient.

Moral Outrage

Writing in his diary after Eden had called a halt to military operations in Egypt, Harold Nicolson commented on the analogy which was already being drawn between Suez and Munich: 'The sad thing is that whereas at the time of Munich, we who opposed Chamberlain were proved right in six months, it will never become utterly apparent how bad Eden's action was.' Nicolson, who had opposed appeasement in the 1930s, was appalled that a Prime Minister 'who had made his reputation by [his] moral courage should out of exasperation have violated his principles and told his country a series of shameful lies'.[2] Even as he wrote, it was already clear that Eden had injured Britain's special relationship with the United States and its leadership of the Commonwealth by resorting to force without United Nations sanction, and that he had then reacted to international opposition by calling a halt to the venture. His conduct was attacked in the press, parliament and public demonstrations. The Speaker of the House of Commons frequently struggled to maintain order. In the House of Lords, the Archbishop of Canterbury, still regarded as the conscience of the nation, was forthright in his condemnation. Eden's justification for intervention – that it prevented world war – convinced very few. As one of the Queen's private secretaries recalled nearly forty years later, 'the basic dishonesty of the whole thing

1 An abridged version of this chapter appeared in *History Today*, 56/11 (November 2006): 48–50.

2 Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson Diaries and Letters 1907–1964* (London, 2005), 10 November and 15 December 1956, pp. 453, 454.

was a trouble'.[3] When it became evident that the Prime Minister had colluded with France and Israel, flouted the conventions of Cabinet government and misled parliament, the warmongers of Suez joined the appeasers of Munich in the rogues' gallery of guilty men.[4]

Yet contrasts between the episodes are marked. Unlike Sèvres, Munich took place in the full glare of publicity, and, unlike Eden, Chamberlain appeared a well-meaning, if naive, man of peace. Moreover, whereas Chamberlain's popularity soared on his return from Munich only to plummet on the outbreak of war, at every twist and turn in the Suez saga the British fulminated against the moral bankruptcy of their leader. Suez did not, however, provoke a simple clash between the adherence to principle and the cynical pursuit of *Realpolitik*. Nor did it polarize the nation on moral grounds. Rather, the contest encompassed a range of views relating to personal integrity and national honour. Every aspect of Britain's role in the affair – be it the treaty of 1954 providing for British withdrawal from the base, or the diplomatic search for reconciliation after the nationalization of the Canal, or the ultimatum of 30 October, or the cease-fire on 6 November – excited protest in one quarter or another. The crisis split families, cut through generations and agitated the country to such an extent that debate descended into hysteria. The rights and wrongs of it divided government, crossed party lines and strained the neutrality of the public services, with the result that embattled groups consisted of odd sets of allies who in other circumstances would have been uncomfortable in each other's company.

The extent to which ministers were excluded from the decision-making process or disagreed with the resort to force has been reappraised as archival material has been released. Although only two junior ministers, Anthony Nutting and Edward Boyle, quitted office over the affair, from the moment when armed intervention seemed likely there was a good deal of dithering in Cabinet. Walter Monckton, who expressed serious reservations about the use of force and in any case appeared to be on the verge of a breakdown, was replaced as Minister of Defence by Antony Head, but was persuaded to serve as Postmaster-General. John Hare (Secretary of State for War), James Stuart (Scottish Office) and Patrick Buchan-Hepburn (Minister of Works) also opposed the use of force but remained in office. When Lord Hailsham discovered, on becoming First Lord of the Admiralty in September 1956, that the government was committed to a military operation, he called it 'madness' but supported it all the same, and later argued that the government should have shown greater resolution. The insanity of the project also disturbed R.A. Butler, Lord Privy Seal, but, with an 'appeasing' past to live down, he became so irresolute that he forfeited trust on all sides of the party and ever after remained evasive about his part in the affair.

3 Lord Charteris, quoted in Peter Hennessy, *The Prime Minister: The Office and its Holders since 1945* (London, 2000), p. 218.

4 The original *Guilty Men* by 'Cato' (Peter Howard, Frank Owen and Michael Foot), published in 1940, had attacked Chamberlain and his associates. In their *Guilty Men* of 1957, Michael Foot and Mervyn Jones pilloried Eden and also Macmillan's Cabinet as 'morally unfit to govern' on account of their 'brazen' championship' of imperialism symbolized by the Suez expedition. In *Guilty Men of Suez* (1957), Frank Verity targeted Nasser, John Foster Dulles, British left-wing intellectuals and socialists, except Stanley Evans, the one pro-Suez Labour MP who lost his seat on account of the stand he took.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold Macmillan, did not vacillate; he did a U-turn: 'First in, first out', he was dubbed 'the leader of the bolters'.[5]

Beyond Cabinet, unrest was widespread in the Conservative Party, although much of the dissent was either repressed for fear of rocking the boat or suppressed by parliamentary whips. Those who questioned policy or went so far as to abstain in parliamentary votes imperilled their careers and reputations. The dissidents comprised some twenty backbenchers, loosely co-ordinated by Sir Alexander Spearman, and included Robert Boothby, Jacob Astor and Nigel Nicolson. In November, 11 of them (amongst whom was the recently elected Keith Joseph, at that time one of two Jewish Conservative MPs) signed a letter to the Prime Minister urging that British forces in Egypt be placed under UN orders, and 8 abstained in the vote of confidence. Spearman, who was not an abstainer, was none the less hauled before the executive of his constituency to give an account of himself. Of the abstainers, Cyril Banks, Sir Frank Medlicott, Nigel Nicolson and Anthony Nutting lost their seats. Nicolson managed to hang on for two years before being disowned. Nutting was branded a 'renegade', and retired from public life. Even though Macmillan brought him back into government in January 1957, for a time Boyle contemplated leaving politics altogether.[6]

Conservative advocates of firm government at home and abroad, by contrast, were dismayed by Eden's vacillation and the pusillanimity of a government which in 1954 negotiated withdrawal from the Suez base and in November 1956 succumbed to international pressure to abandon military operations. They excoriated retreat as a supine display of loss of will, and lamented the betrayal of British troops serving overseas in yet another forgotten army. Suez revivified their commitment to a traditional moral code. They robustly upheld the virtues of patriotism and imperial responsibility, particularly in the Middle East. In Cabinet, Lord Salisbury personified the more patrician of these values. In the Commons, the ranks of the Suez Group, which had been formed at the first sign of British withdrawal from the Middle East in 1951, swelled to over a hundred at the height of the crisis. The Group brought together appeasers and anti-appeasers from the 1930s, Commonwealth men and Europeanists, Tory diehards and Conservative modernizers whose common purpose in 1956 was the defence of national honour. The group was abetted by members of the House of Lords, notably Lord Killearn, who, as ambassador to Egypt during the Second World War, had forced King Farouk at gunpoint to comply with British demands, and Lord Cromer, who went so far as to address the peers in the full dress uniform of a colonel of the Grenadier Guards.[7]

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5 For the positions taken by ministers, see Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London, 1991); Hennessy, *The Prime Minister*, pp. 217–47, which challenges the claim made by several participants that Cabinet was kept in the dark, and entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, online edn: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>).

6 See in particular Leon D. Epstein, *British Policy in the Suez Crisis* (London, 1964), ch. 5 and 6, and Sue Onslow, *Backbench Debate within the Conservative Party and its Influence on British Foreign Policy, 1948–57* (Basingstoke, 1997) pp. 124ff.

7 For the Suez Group, see Onslow, *Backbench Debate within the Conservative Party*; '"Battlelines for Suez": The Abadan Crisis of 1951 and the Formation of the Suez Group', *Contemporary British History*, 17/2 (2003): 1–28; 'Suez group (*act.* 1953–1957)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, online edn, May 2007).

The parliamentary opposition was at first wrong-footed by the crisis. Then Jo Grimond, who had recently taken over the leadership of the Liberal Party from Clement Davies, spoke eloquently against government policy. For Grimond, parliament 'existed to promote a sense of civic moral purpose and engage in a moral critique of the life of the nation'. A product of Eton and Balliol and husband of Asquith's granddaughter, he was a Whig grandee with a social conscience who cut an impressive figure in the House of Commons.[8] But Grimond was leader of a mere handful of MPs. Far more significant politically would be the reaction of the Labour Party. Suez was the first major crisis faced by Hugh Gaitskell, who had been elected party leader the previous December. Cautioned by Jewish Labour MPs, notably Emanuel Shinwell, who strongly supported military intervention, he appeared at first to countenance armed confrontation with Egypt. On 31 October, he turned and condemned military intervention as 'an act of disastrous folly', but his appeal to Conservative waverers to join the Opposition's call for Eden's resignation proved counter-productive.

The press was at the heart of the debate over the rights and wrongs of Suez. The *Daily Mail* urged Eden to take tough action, as did the *Daily Express*, known as 'the imperial crusader', and the *Daily Telegraph*, which in January 1956 had goaded the Prime Minister with its call for the 'smack of firm government'. Papers that criticized Eden courted charges of treason and jeopardized sales and advertising revenue. Nevertheless, Alastair Hetherington, who had just taken over as editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, condemned the venture as an 'act of folly, without justification in any terms but brief expediency', and David Astor's editorial in the *Observer* accused the government of 'crookedness'.[9] The political editor of the *Daily Mirror*, Sydney Jacobsen, joined the attack (thereby losing 70,000 readers), as did Michael Foot of the *New Statesman* and Ian Gilmour of the *Spectator*. Even *The Times* in the end distanced itself from the actions of the Prime Minister. Although these papers had an impact on opinion that was out of all proportion to their circulation, the claim that at Suez the fourth estate vindicated its role as watchdog of the public interest has been questioned since, up to a point, Eden was remarkably successful in influencing the media. In any case, Fleet Street was by and large instinctively more bellicose than the general public, and the BBC tended to favour Eden in its commentaries, as distinct from its impartial reporting.[10]

The crisis strained the political neutrality of senior military officers and civil servants, and led to tension between them.[11] Sir Gerald Templer, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, never wavered in his support for the invasion, but on 2 November Lord Mountbatten protested against plans which were bound to lead to large-scale civilian

8 Obituaries by John Calder, David Steel and Tam Dalyell, *Independent*, 23 October 1993; Ian Bradley, 'Grimond, Joseph, Baron Grimond (1913–1993)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, May 2005).

9 See Richard Cockett, *David Astor and the Observer* (London, 1991), pp. 207–34.

10 See Tony Shaw, 'British Government Propaganda and Persuasion during the 1956 Suez Crisis', DPhil. thesis (Oxford, 1993).

11 See Saul Kelly and Anthony Gorst (eds), *Whitehall and the Suez Crisis* (London, 2000).

casualties. Mountbatten offered his resignation, but for his own protection was ordered to remain at his post by the First Lord of the Admiralty. Air Chief Marshal Sir Denis Smallwood dismissed as 'utterly phoney' the reasons given by Eden for the invasion.[12] The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook, held to a pragmatic course throughout, keeping the Cabinet in step, preserving continuity of government during the interregnum between Eden and Macmillan, and weeding incriminating evidence for a venture which he privately regarded as a 'cock-up'.[13] Senior officials in the Foreign Office were dismayed not only by the unwavering support for the use of force shown by that anti-appeaser of the 1930s who was now their Permanent Secretary, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, but more especially by his connivance at their exclusion from decision-making during the crucial weeks in October and early November.[14] Heads of mission overseas – Gladwyn Jebb in Paris, William Hayter in Moscow, Humphrey Trevelyan in Cairo, Malcolm MacDonald in New Delhi – were ignored, and some officials in Whitehall contemplated resignation. One young diplomat, Evan Luard, did resign, stating:

> I belong to a generation which was brought up in the belief that for one nation to undertake the use of armed force against another in order to promote its own interests is morally wrong. I grew up during a war which, I understood, was fought for the establishment of that principle.

In flouting the UN Charter, the government 'seems to have betrayed everything for which I had believed that this country stood'.[15] It was a view shared by many of his contemporaries, who, as they rose to prominence in the coming years, would not forget 'the lessons of Suez'.

End of Empire

Looking back on the Suez debacle more than thirty years later, Denis Healey remarked that it was not only 'a demonstration of moral and intellectual bankruptcy'; it was also 'a turning point in postwar history' since 'it signified the end of Britain's imperial role outside Europe'.[16] This judgement has been elaborated along the

12 Hennessy, *The Prime Minister*, p. 220.

13 See Keith Kyle, 'The Mandarins' Mandarin', in Kelly and Gorst (eds), *Whitehall*, pp. 64–78. To date, no trace of any British copy of the Sèvres Protocol has been found, but otherwise, the 'main story that emerges from [the files released in December 2006] is Whitehall's concern to gather up, safeguard and release papers on Suez. Far from any cover-up, they reveal that a systematic search was conducted within government departments to collate and review all Suez-related records, many of which were not registered at the time.' See 'Release of files relating to the Suez crisis in December 2006', <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/releases/2006/december/suez.htm>.

14 Anne Lane, 'The Past as Matrix: Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs', in Kelly and Gorst (eds), *Whitehall*, pp. 214–16.

15 Adam Roberts, 'Luard, (David) Evan Trant (1926–1991)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

16 Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London, 1990), pp. 169, 213.

following lines. Suez revealed Britain's incapacity to act without American approval and reduced its much-vaunted ability to 'punch above its weight'. Britain's leadership of the Commonwealth was gravely damaged, and it became 'Enemy Number One' at the United Nations.[17] Suez ended Britain's 'moment in the Middle East', fanned colonial resistance in Africa and called into question the future of 'fortress colonies'. It taught the British government no end of a lesson in international realities, and was 'a moment of blinding revelation for many British people that the days of empire were numbered'.[18] In short, Suez dropped the curtain on the age of deference and hammered home the need for a post-imperial role. Consequently, this interpretation continues, after the Suez crisis the British abandoned imperial pretensions and hopes for an independent foreign policy to return to the fold of the special relationship as very much the junior partner. At the same time, Macmillan conducted a cost–benefit analysis of colonies, radically reviewed Britain's role in global defence, accelerated African decolonization, moved away from the Commonwealth and towards Europe, and began a reappraisal of Britain's historic commitments east of Suez which were wound up by the Labour government in the late 1960s. Thus, having been morally disarmed in 1956, within a decade the empire had all but disappeared.

Historians should always be on their guard against falling for the fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, and, as more material has become available on policymaking, they have grown increasingly circumspect about investing the crisis with unwarranted results. Eden was neither the first nor the last government minister to lie for his country abroad and to his countrymen at home. Moreover, Suez was neither the first nor the last instance of imperial aggression to cause a public outcry. As Britain's ambassador to Egypt later remarked:

> In 1882, the bombardment of Alexandria and the British occupation of Egypt had divided British opinion on the same lines. John Bright had declared the British action to be 'a manifest violation of international and moral law', while Lord Randolph Churchill had accused Mr Gladstone of an act of criminal aggression against Egypt and demanded that he should be thrown out of Egypt bag and baggage.[19]

Furthermore, the end of empire had been signalled at intervals from the loss of the North American colonies to the fall of Singapore in 1942 which surely destroyed British authority in Asia. Indeed, the age of imperialism was pronounced dead in the Second World War, at the end of which, A.J.P. Taylor observed, the British people had 'ceased to believe' in empire.[20] And yet the empire re-formed after each reverse:

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17 See Wm. Roger Louis, 'Public Enemy Number One: Britain and the United Nations in the Aftermath of Suez', in Martin Lynn (ed.), *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 186–213, and 'Suez and Decolonization: Scrambling out of Africa and Asia', in Wm. Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization* (London, 2006), pp. 1–31.

18 Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918–1968* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 239.

19 Humphrey Trevelyan, *The Middle East in Revolution* (London, 1970), p. 129.

20 A.J.P. Taylor to Wm. Roger Louis; see Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay 1941–1945* (Oxford, 1977), p. x.

the loss of Singapore kindled a new imperialism in Southeast Asia, and the transfer power to India ignited a second occupation of Africa. Similarly, Britain's humiliation at Suez would be followed by military intervention elsewhere in the Middle East. On each occasion when the imperial embers were raked, flames of controversy flared up. In 1959, for example, the scandal of Kenya's Hola Camp and the Nyasaland disturbances threatened to topple Macmillan's government, and for years after the collapse of the Central African Federation white minority rule in Rhodesia split opinion at home and once again isolated Britain in the Commonwealth and at the United Nations.

Neither the imperial project nor the imperial contest, therefore, ceased with Suez. The Suez Group's campaign for 'Britain and Empire' represented what Sue Onslow has identified as 'a continuum of political thought' which periodically divided the Conservative Party from the battle for tariff reform in the early twentieth century to the rows over European integration during the Major administration.[21] After the Suez crisis, the group's diehards opposed withdrawal from Cyprus, and they and their successors, together with the League of Empire Loyalists, continued to campaign against any diminution of Britain's imperial standing. In reaction to Macmillan's 'wind of change speech', they formed the Monday Club with Lord Salisbury as the first president. They supported kith and kin in Africa, demanded strict control of Commonwealth immigration, and in due course became the arch Eurosceptics of the 1990s. Such rearguard views were countered by the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF), which brought together earlier bodies such as the Fabian Colonial Bureau and the British branch of the communist Congress of Peoples against Imperialism. Led in parliament by Fenner Brockway from 1954 until 1964, when the issue of race contributed to the loss of his seat, the MCF was a powerful pressure group which lobbied for colonial self-determination, the cause of the Greek Cypriots and African rights. The MCF did not, however, speak for the party as a whole, and prudent members of Labour's front bench baulked at some of its simplistic solutions to colonial problems.[22]

Continuity in imperial policy matched continuity in imperial attitudes. Some of the so-called 'lessons of Suez' were lessons that had been heeded well before 1956. The Anglo-American coalition had underpinned the war effort and post-war recovery. During the 1950s, successive British governments learned to manipulate this alliance. They also became skilled in trimming policies, or rather the presentation of their policies, to winds of change and to the mounting international hostility to old-world imperialism. Although Anglo-American action against Mossadeq's Iran set something of a precedent for 'regime change' in 'rogue states' in the Middle East, the Attlee government had pulled back from unilateral military intervention when the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had been nationalized in 1951. As Foreign Secretary in 1951–55, Eden subtly adapted policy to Britain's reduced circumstances while

21 Onslow, *Backbench Debate within the Conservative Party* and 'Suez group' (*act.* 1953–1957)'.

22 Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Imperialists at Bay: British Labour and Decolonization', in Robert D. King and Robin Kilson (eds), *The Statecraft of British Imperialism: Essays in Honour of Wm. Roger Louis* (London, 1999), pp. 233–54.

striving to restrain bellicose cold warriors. For example, as the French withdrew from Vietnam following their defeat at Dien Bien Phu, he insisted that 'Communism in Asia cannot be checked by military means alone. The problem is as much political as military; if any military combination is to be effective, it must enjoy the widest measure of Asian support.'[23]

Eden's venture at Suez two years later proved to be an emotional deviation from a post-war realism bordering on appeasement, of which he himself had become a past master. Notwithstanding his deft diplomacy, like many of his generation Eden was unwilling to accept the role of junior partner to the United States. He resented the conditions that constrained freedom of action, and yearned for a chance to reassert British autonomy in areas, like the Middle East, which had traditionally been regarded as British spheres. Nasser's nationalization of the Canal appeared to offer such an opportunity. Yet, however cynical his stratagem may have been, it was not lack of principle but flawed statecraft that caused it to founder. At Suez, Eden proved to be incompetent in Bismarck's art of the possible, or what J.K. Galbraith called the knack of choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable. He was neither ruthless enough nor sufficiently pragmatic to excel in *Realpolitik*. Instead, he revisited the diplomatic battlefields of the 1930s, paid off old scores with the Americans, and failed to recognize that 'what we could do in 1882, we could not do in 1956'.[24] One of Eden's principal failings was to ignore the strength of world opinion regarding a moral issue that had become intrinsic to the practice of international relations. Although the West, the East and the non-aligned were selective in identifying the manifestations of imperialism, they were all anti-imperialists now. Ironically, three years before the Suez crisis, Eden himself had warned his Cabinet colleagues of the new international climate to which they had to accustom themselves: 'In the second half of the twentieth century we cannot hope to maintain our position in the Middle East by the methods of the last century.'[25]

Just as the 'lessons of Suez' had been anticipated before 1956, other post-Suez developments had pre-Suez origins. By exposing the vulnerability of sterling and the reserves, the crisis reinforced the need to press on with existing policies, notably reduction of overseas expenditure. Soon after he became Prime Minister in January 1957, Macmillan initiated a cost–benefit analysis of colonial dependencies which appears to be refreshingly hard-headed. It was not, however, induced by the Suez debacle. It resurrected one element of a full-scale policy review which Eden had initiated six months earlier but which had been interrupted by the Suez crisis.[26] Macmillan tempered the economic evaluation of empire by stipulating that any recommendations made on financial and economic grounds would have 'to be

23 Eden, secret telegram from Geneva to Foreign Office, 30 April 1954, TNA, PREM 11/649, also reproduced in Anthony Eden, *Memoirs: Full Circle* (London, 1960), p. 109.

24 Trevelyan, *The Middle East*, p. 129.

25 'Egypt: The alternatives', memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 16 February 1953, C(53)65, TNA, CAB 129/59. To Eden's discomfiture, Brook re-circulated this memo to Cabinet in April 1956; see Kyle, 'The Mandarins' Mandarin', p. 65.

26 See David Goldsworthy (ed.), *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire 1951–1957* (London, 1994), pt 1, pp. 61ff, 91.

weighed against the political and strategic considerations involved in each case'.[27] Like Disraeli, Macmillan had no use for colonial millstones, but paid considerable attention to global influence. As it happened, officials were not spurred into ending empire. They felt that the remarkable achievement of independence by Ghana on 6 March 1957, which had originally been planned for 1956 and therefore had nothing to do with Suez, was exceptional. It had proceeded at a faster pace than the rest of West Africa could take, and did not provide a model for East Africa, where a 'strengthening of United Kingdom interest' was required. Early withdrawal from settler colonies would 'bring to a shabby conclusion an important and hopeful experiment in race relations … and a decline in United Kingdom prestige much more significant and enduring than the self-congratulatory applause of the anti-colonial, anti-Western world'.[28] Whitehall's elaborate profit and loss account of the colonies proved to be so evenly balanced that, with the exception of Cyprus, decolonization was 'put on the back-burner for the next two years'.[29] Indeed, while the Suez operation had revealed the limited strategic value of Cyprus and cleared the way for disengagement, constitutional change in Malta, where the expedition had assembled, was scarcely affected by the post-Suez reappraisal.[30] Thus, contrary to the fears of progressives that Suez would delay decolonization and to the hopes of radicals that it would accelerate it, policy returned to keeping change within bounds.[31]

A few months after Macmillan had called for a cost–benefit analysis of the colonial empire, Duncan Sandys' defence white paper announced 'the biggest change in military policy ever made in normal times'.[32] It was a response in part to the overriding priority of regaining national solvency and in part to an appreciation of deterrence strategy, both of which had exercised Macmillan as minister of defence and chancellor of the Exchequer. It had been foreshadowed by analyses in 1954–55, and should be seen as one in a series of attempts by post-war governments to live within their means. The most recent of these had been Eden's inquiry into government expenditure, which had recognized that Britain had 'ceased to be a first-class Power in material terms' and that since 1945 'we have tried to do too much'.[33] The Sandys proposals included a radical 'switch in resources' from conventional to nuclear weaponry and the end of national service. Yet they also endorsed far-flung commitments, particularly in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, which were

27 Personal minute from the Prime Minister to the Lord President of the Council (Lord Salisbury), 28 January 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1555.

28 Ronald Hyam and Wm. Roger Louis (eds), *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire 1957–1964* (London, 2000), pt 1, pp. 9, 16–17.

29 Hyam, introduction to Hyam and Louis (eds), *The Conservative Government*, p. xxviii.

30 See Simon C. Smith, 'Integration and Disintegration: The Attempted Incorporation of Malta into the United Kingdom in the 1950s', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 35/1 (2007): 49–72.

31 Cf. David Goldsworthy, '"Keeping change within bounds": Aspects of Colonial Policy during the Churchill and Eden Governments, 1951–57', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 18/1 (1990): 81–108.

32 'Defence: Outline of Future Policy', Cmnd 124 (February 1957), para. 67.

33 Goldsworthy (ed.), *The Conservative Government*, pt 1, pp. 61, 78.

reaffirmed in the study of future policy initiated by Macmillan in 1959 and not seriously questioned until 1964.[34]

Far from condemning Britain to 'permanent subservience to American policy',[35] Suez reinforced a determination to uphold its remaining interests in the region. This is reflected in Sir Paul Gore-Booth's statement: 'It is not true to say, as some liberals too highly charged with emotion said at the time, that this performance marked the end of our ability to act effectively in the Middle East.'[36] During the next decade, both the Conservative and Labour governments built on an imperial heritage to retain influence, secure oil supplies and contain Nasser's regional ambitions.[37] Sometimes the United States was content to allow Britain a free hand, but on occasions when their aims diverged, the British acted unilaterally, as when they defied American wishes regarding the recognition of the Yemen Republic. Moreover, they were prepared to intervene militarily. Thus, British troops were sent to Jordan in 1958 at the invitation of King Hussein, to Kuwait in 1961 in order to deter an Iraqi invasion, and to south Arabia for the defence of the Aden base, which by 1962 had become 'more important to HMG than ever before'.[38] Notwithstanding regular analyses of commitments, successive governments shared a fundamental misconception of British power and an inability to cut their coat according to their cloth. When local resistance and financial considerations combined to force retreat, they were unable to control the manner of their departure, which degenerated into 'a scuttle on Palestine lines'.[39] Ironically, British withdrawal from this imperial bastion was made the more difficult by spoiling activity on the part of a UN mission and by American entreaties for the British to stay.

The 1957 defence review had not curbed military expenditure in Southeast Asia. By June 1963, it was more than double that in the Middle East. Although the creation of Malaysia (through the merger of Malaya, Singapore and British Borneo territories) held out the prospect of economies, these were negated by armed confrontation with Indonesia in 1963–66. When he took office in October 1964, Harold Wilson was advised that a military presence east of Suez would be insupportable by the 1970s. The Labour government's focus on the modernization

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34 Hyam, introduction to Hyam and Louis (eds), *The Conservative Government*, pp. xli–xliv.

35 W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1991), p. 324.

36 Paul Gore-Booth, *With Great Respect* (London, 1974), p. 228.

37 Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorate 1955–67: Last Outposts of a Middle East Empire* (London, 2005).

38 Sir Charles Johnston, Governor of Aden, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17 May 1962, quoted in Simon C. Smith, 'Revolution and Reaction: South Arabia in the Aftermath of the Yemeni Revolution', in Kent Fedorowich and Martin Thomas (eds), *International Diplomacy and Colonial Retreat* (London, 2001), p. 202.

39 Before he accepted the appointment of last High Commissioner, Trevelyan made it clear that he did 'not want to be associated with a scuttle on Palestinian lines'; in his final despatch to the Foreign Secretary, he claimed that although the manner of withdrawal had been unsatisfactory, 'in the end we went in peace and with dignity'; S.R. Ashton and Wm. Roger Louis (eds), *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964–1971* (London, 2004), pt 1, pp. 239, 281.

and economic recovery of Britain together with the Parliamentary Labour Party's opposition to America's war in Vietnam and the rising defence budget, pointed to cuts. In fact, reaching this decision was an erratic process, complicated by ministerial equivocation, departmental battles and general anxiety regarding likely reactions overseas. In the end, it was the devaluation of the pound in November 1967 that impelled action by a Prime Minister who had once famously declared that Britain's frontier lay on the Himalayas. The decision to pull back from east of Suez dismayed Britain's allies. Some Australians compared it with the so-called 'great betrayal' of 1942, while the US Secretary of State 'could not believe that free aspirins and false teeth were more important than Britain's role in the world'.[40] Yet, although Conservatives called it 'scuttle', they did not reverse the decision when they were re-elected in 1970.[41]

The Suez crisis proved that recklessness in either intervention or retreat ran the risk of national humiliation and international isolation; it reinforced in the official mind the importance of a measured approach to ending empire. After 1956, Britain's ability to sustain its global interests depended, as in large measure it had done before 1956, on its relationship with America and to lesser extent on its leadership of the Commonwealth. The government did not servilely abandon historic interests overseas; nor did the United States expect it to do so. As they set about repairing the Anglo-American schism, ministers and their officials took care to counter ingrained aversion to the empire by presenting Washington with the acceptable face of colonialism, just as they had done after the fall of Singapore and again at the start of the Cold War. Following the Suez crisis, they once more emphasized Britain's record of progressive rule and its professed commitment to self-government. By this time, the United States needed no persuading that colonialism was a lesser evil than communism, and accepted that Britain's evolutionary approach to the management of empire would be more successful than a rigid timetable in securing emergent successor states from the perils of subversion and revolution. By and large, Washington accepted the pace of decolonization in Africa; elsewhere, it even tried to slow it down. Its protests against British decisions to pull out of the Gulf, south Arabia and Southeast Asia were made in vain, but when decolonization came to its own backyard, America insisted that Cheddi Jagan's left-wing government should be removed before the grant of independence to British Guyana.[42]

The Suez operation was a major reverse for Britain and aroused abhorrence at home and abroad, but the claim that it 'wrote *finis* to the British Empire'[43] fails to take into account the variety of British reactions as well as differences over the nation's rightful position in the world. Notwithstanding the condemnation of

40 Dean Rusk to George Brown, as reported by Brown, 12 January 1968, quoted in Ashton and Louis (eds), *East of Suez*, pt 1, p. 131, note.

41 See Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice between Europe and the World* (Basingstoke, 2002).

42 S.R. Ashton and David Killingray (eds), *The West Indies* (London, 1999), pp. lxxvii, 597ff.

43 'The Suez operation wrote *finis* not only to the British Empire but to all the empires of western Europe'; Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (London, 1985), p. 277.

British imperialism, the ebb and flow of empire washed over the supposed Suez watershed. One Edwardian prime minister was succeeded by another who presumed that there were still 'places where it is of vital interest to us that we should maintain our influence',[44] an influence which the United States continued to value. Alongside the desire to assert authority in world affairs, however, loomed the pressing need to reduce public expenditure. Just as imperialism pock-marked the history of Britain from 1945 to 1970, so too did spending reviews. Britain's economic predicament had contributed to the failure of the Suez venture, and it was this condition, rather than repercussions of the 1956 crisis, that primarily determined the speed and manner in which empire came to an end.

44 Prime Minister to the Lord President of the Council, 28 January 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1555.

Conclusion

Scott Lucas

> If [Britain] had to go down now, the Government and … British people would rather do so on this issue than become perhaps another Netherlands.
>
> Harold Macmillan, 30 July 1956[1]

I was heartened to read, in his introduction to this volume, Simon Smith's invocation of 'the interconnections between the regional and the international contexts' of Suez. I have to declare that, in part, this is because of self-interest. Almost twenty years ago, as I was pursuing my doctoral research, I recognized the 'patterns within the region' of the crisis, but seduced perhaps by the drama of the great/flawed man narrative (and the possibility of boosting book sales), I later emphasized 'the power of a single, well-placed person to change the course of history'.[2] In light of the contributions to this volume, I am happy to recant. The Canal Zone is no longer just a space which one fills with narratives of British failure (be it valiant or perfidious), American manoeuvring (be it moral or sinister), and French and Israeli intrigue; Nasser is no longer written in two dimensions acting as Soviet puppet or Arab demagogue. Indeed, the tale is well beyond Egyptian and Israeli borders; the Suez crisis only took its shape because of the interests and actions of Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other countries beyond the Middle East.

Having established this, however, what exactly is our reassessment? After all, various collections from 1991 have tried to represent Suez as a multi-national affair, only to run the risk of merely re-scripting the historical play with more actors, some taking centre stage, others departing to the wings. France colludes, invades, but then leaves for the morass of Algeria and the demise of the Fourth Republic. Britain colludes, invades, and fails with an epilogue of imperial decline or (as portrayed in this volume) a retrenchment of influence. Israel colludes, invades, withdraws but – bolstered by military victory – awaits the Six Day War. Nasser's Egypt survives, bruised by the invasion, but politically emboldened as somehow it extends its sphere of influence into Syria. The United States calls a halt to the proceedings, retains both its European alliances and its moral superiority in the United Nations, and prepares its declaration of regional oversight with the Eisenhower Doctrine.

For Suez cannot be treated as a hermetically sealed episode. Only two years later, in a chain of events arguably as significant as the 1956 crisis but receiving far less attention from scholars, the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown, the Lebanese system

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1 Quoted in London to State Department, Cable 550, 31 July 1956, NARA, Record Group 59, Central Decimal File, 674.84A/7-3156.

2 W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1991), p. x; W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1996), p. ix.

reached the point of collapse, and American forces made their first 'peacetime' landing in the region. If Suez in some way foreshadowed 1967, then these far-from-aftershocks foreshadowed civil wars of 1975 and invasions of 1991 and 2003.

I suggest that we can productively re-conceive the 'regional' in the Suez crisis, thus connecting not only to international contexts but back to national frameworks and systems through an approach which highlights the 'projection of power'. This in no way denies specific political, economic or military interests, but suggests that the contest was for far more than the re-occupation of the Canal Zone and 'liberation' of the Suez Canal Company, the breaking of Nasser's support for the Algerian insurgency, or the decimation of Egypt's Soviet-supplied tanks and aircraft. Territorial possession and military victory (except possibly for Israel) mattered far less than the presentation – hopefully, but not necessarily, underpinned by some moral rationale – of superiority. The challenge to London was not just the seizure of an Anglo-French company and its assets, less than two years after Her Majesty's troops had left the Suez Canal Base, but as Nasser announced the nationalization, the image of a giant float with 'the Sphinx swallowing a British soldier with the British flag sown on his derriere'.[3] As *The Times* framed the government's position on 1 August:

> If Nasser is allowed to get away with his coup, all the British other Western interests in the Middle East will crumble. Quibbling over whether or not [Nasser] was 'legally entitled' to make the grab will delight the finicky and comfort the faint-hearted but entirely misses the issues.[4]

It is through such projection that one can, for example, draw a line between the eviction of the British from Abadan in 1951 and the determination to rebuff Egypt's nationalization five years later. Similarly, one might consider that Suez offered France the opportunity to redeem its ejection from the Levant – by British forces – at the end of the Second World War, not only through the evolving Franco-Israeli alliance but through a redemption of French power in the Arab world. One might posit that, in a far different sense, Suez allowed Washington to project a power that was not only separate from but positioned against the use of military operations to control the region. And one might add to Laura James's examination of Nasser in Chapter 10 by considering his attempted projection of power, not only in the Arab and Islamic worlds but also in his membership in the non-aligned movement between the supposed great powers.

The significance of this projection was not that it reinforced existing strategic evaluations. To the contrary, in the British case, that demonstration ran counter to the trend of London's planning from 1952. In the Global Strategy paper issued that year, the Churchill Government had acknowledged that Britain no longer had the economic and military resources to maintain its presence, at least through conventional forces, throughout the world. As Britain searched for a new regional strategy, Eden recognized:

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3 Alexandria to State Department, Despatch 1, 28 July 1956, NARA, Record Group 59, Central Decimal File, 774.11/7-2856.

4 *The Times*, 1 August 1956.

> In the second half of the 20th century, we cannot hope to maintain our position in the Middle East by the methods of the last century. However little we like it, we must face that fact … If we are to maintain our influence in the area, future policy must be designed to harness these [nationalist] movements rather than to struggle against them.[5]

The Eden of 1952–53 was Foreign Secretary, however, rather than Prime Minister, and the Macmillan of 1952–53 was Minister of Housing rather than a scheming Chancellor of the Exchequer. Equally important, as Sue Onslow points out in Chapter 4, this consideration of how to project Britain's power was going on well beyond 10 Downing Street and the Cabinet. With the fragmentation of the British system for policymaking and operations, there was not one but several 'foreign policies', including one emanating from the Prime Minister's office, one from the Foreign Office, and one from MI6 working with private allies, including venturesome MPs, a shadow Egyptian government and King Zog of Albania.

One of the highlights of the Suez commemoration conferences, many of which focused on reconsiderations of 'national' approaches to the crisis, is that this consideration of the 'systematic' may be applied not only to Britain but also to countries such as France, Israel and Egypt. What is essential, however, is that the systematic is aligned with the notion of the projection of power, not to occlude the regional dimension of Suez but to bring out its importance.

For, in the end, it was those regional interactions that complicated attempted projections of power. By 14 October 1956, with all his rhetorical posturing and explosions of temper, Anthony Eden was ready to accept a negotiated settlement of the Suez crisis. Then, however, two French emissaries re-presented the regional dimension to the Prime Minister. Messrs Gazier and Challe explained that Israel was about to attack Jordan, occupying the West Bank, and given that Britain was aligned by treaty with Amman and France was aligned by its ongoing political and military negotiations with Tel Aviv, Paris and London would be opponents rather than allies. To avoid this, all that was needed was a re-configuration of the regional, one in which Britain and France colluded with Israel to overthrow Nasser.

If the strategic complexities of the regional allowed Britain to revive its hoped-for projection of power, they soon exposed the illusions of that projection. London's lack of resources in support of its Middle Eastern presence led to a haphazard, indeed farcical, military plan, one which was produced not by its generals and admirals, but by its politicians and covert operators to remove Nasser through bombing and psychological warfare. And the difficulties of London's diplomatic position, one further complicated by Washington's role in negotiations in and beyond the region, led to the acceptance of the ill-fated collusion with France and Israel. As Eden rationalized to Cabinet colleagues:

> If [Israel] contemplated any military operations against the Arabs, it was far better from our point of view that they should attack Egypt … He had therefore thought it right to make it known to the Israelis, through the French, that in the event of hostilities between Egypt and Israel, the UK Government would not come to the assistance of Egypt.[6]

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5 See the Introduction to Lucas, *Divided We Stand* (1991).

6 Record of meeting, 18 October 1956, TNA, CAB 128/30, CM 71 (56).

The folly of readings of Suez which wedge the crisis into narratives of Eden's rejection of appeasement or of Cold War manoeuvrings is that the Middle East is not examined, but fitted into a history – much as Eden and Macmillan tried to fit it into their desperate visions of British power – of the 'West'. In that context, the ongoing debate over whether Suez constituted a 'watershed' for Britain's international position needs to be re-framed. One may cling to tangible markers of a continuing but limited British presence, be this the role of political adviser to Persian Gulf sheikhdoms, arms provider, or even supplier of mercenary forces, after 1956. Symbolically, however, Suez represented the collapse of London's power, not only to the French who turned away from a perfidious Albion, not only to the Americans who moved to fill the vacuum, but also to the emerging regional leaders from Tel Aviv to Cairo to Riyadh.

For the 'West' and indeed the 'East' of the Soviet Union, the legacy of Suez rested not only in the recession of British Empire, but in the complications for those who continued to misread the Middle East. Two months after the Suez War, the US government would try to step in as the new overseer of the region through the Eisenhower Doctrine, attempting to set up King Saud as the new pan-Arab ruler. Two years afterwards, this vision collapsed amidst regime change in Baghdad, political crisis in Beirut (a crisis supposedly abated by the first peacetime landing of American troops in the Middle East, only to recur less than twenty years later), and union between Cairo and Damascus. The central dynamic for change – from 1958 through 1967 through 1979 – lay not in the imposition of Western power but in the negotiations and actions of those within the region.

Fifty years after Suez, the Middle East is no more to be 'acted upon' than it was at mid-century. In January 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld offered the first National Security Council meeting of the Bush Administration the same logic that lay behind Eden and Macmillan's rationale for a projection of power in 1956. Just as the removal of Nasser would 'protect' pro-Western regimes elsewhere, so regime change in Baghdad would ensure a Middle East in the Western image: 'Imagine what the region would look like without Saddam and with a regime that is aligned with U.S. interests. It would change everything in the region and beyond. It would demonstrate what U.S. policy is all about.' The difference is merely one of timeframe rather than effect as the 'regional' dimension unfolds: if British rationalizations collapsed in a few days and the French reoriented their foreign policy in a few months, the fraying of the American mission is a long-term process.

At the end of an earlier conference in London, the British historian Peter Hennessy commented: 'What we need is a global history of Suez.' With this conference and the essays it has stimulated, I believe we have a starting point for this investigation and reinterpretation. Such a history need not be detached from the 'national', notably the divisions, conflicts and confusion that arise within each political system rather than the purportedly coherent policy that issues from each government. At the same time, that global history need not and should not consist of a juxtaposition of national narratives. Instead, the consideration of Suez 1956 as an episode where 'projections of power' intersected and collided both illuminates and undermines contemporary portrayals of the clashes of civilizations and 'the spread of freedom'.

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